

**AGEING WELL: USING ACTION RESEARCH
IN A PARISH CHURCH SETTING**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation reports a research project conducted as part of the Doctor of Practical Theology professional doctorate programme at the University of Birmingham. The research explored how the perceived needs of older people in an Anglican Parish Church might be more adequately understood and addressed through an Action Research strategy. Initial investigation by means of focus groups led to the design and implementation of a short course for people over 55 through which they could share their practical wisdom about how to age well. The course is described and reflected on in detail as the key action within this Participative Action Research process. The research adopted a strengths-based philosophy and was influenced by the approach of Asset Based Community Development. Emergent theory from reflection on practice include non-essentialist, general and specific experiences of ageing which are related back to pastoral ministry. The findings suggest some ordinary ways in which older people can be enabled to adopt a positive attitude, overcome obstacles and challenge a deficit model of ageing. Theological reflections explore issues of normalizing ageing, the ethic of abundance, fullness of life, and a Christian theological anthropology which holds ageing to be a Creation good.

For my parents and godparents.

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I was introduced to Action Research by Professor John Hull and Dr Penny Lacey, of the School of Education of Birmingham University, who supervised my Masters research (2003). Both John and Penny died in 2015 and I want, here, to honour their contribution to their respective fields and give thanks for their inspiring teaching which has enabled me to continue to learn through reflection on my actions.

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List of Abbreviations

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
AR	Action Research
CofE	Church of England
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PT	Practical Theology
PTR	Practical Theological Reflection

Biblical quotations are from NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) unless otherwise stated

INTRODUCTION

How might the perceptions and needs of older people in an Anglican Parish Church be more adequately understood and addressed through an Action Research strategy? This question has guided a practical theological research project and this dissertation describes the process and outcomes from that research. At the heart of this project is a local church community that has sought to respond to issues of ageing including how people might be enabled to age well. The focus of the research was primarily with older people in the Third Age of life rather than those who are more frail or dependent in the Fourth Age (these terms are defined further below). The research was conducted in the context of a Church of England parish church in a suburb of Birmingham and was guided by an Action Research strategy. The origin of the research was the church members' desire to understand and respond better to the needs of older people in the church and wider community. However, during the research, the emphasis shifted towards a strength-based approach which has sought to value ageing and the contribution of older people, and in so doing to move the church away from providing services and towards creating community as a pastoral response. Within the framework of a supportive group and a positive approach, ageing can be accepted as a normal and expected part of life.

Part I of this dissertation introduces the project. Chapter 1 locates this project within the field of practical theology and brings into the foreground my particular commitments as a practitioner and researching professional. The rest of Part I of the dissertation will explore

understandings of ageing and parish ministry (chapter 2), ethics and research methodology (chapter 3), and give an overview of the whole research project (chapter 4).

Part II is an in-depth description and reflection on the main action within the research project: the 'Ageing Well' course. The process and the content of the course are summarised (chapter 5); the results are presented (chapter 6) and then interpreted and evaluated (chapter 7); learning from this key action is presented as a conclusion to this second part of the thesis (chapter 8).

Part III discusses the findings and draws out implications from the research, bringing themes of older age, ministry and action research into a critical conversation (chapter 9).

Part IV presents the conclusions to the overall research project (chapter 10).

The *Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) Handbook* for Birmingham University states that: 'The DPT is assessed by means of a portfolio of work, including a literature review, research proposal, publishable articles and dissertation' (2015, p. 2). Part 2 of the Birmingham DPT requires the candidate to 'undertake original research resulting in a thesis' and 'the whole of the second part of the doctorate is taken up with execution and writing up of a 50,000-word research project dissertation' (*DPT Handbook*, 2015, pp. 14, 17). This thesis is my submission in line with these requirements.

Research Aims

This research project is an attempt to learn from older people and the conviction is that researching in this participative way is more ethical and will produce 'better knowledge' (Tanner, 2010, pp. 2, 25; Ray, 2007, pp. 73-87). This also makes a contribution to 'knowledge-based practice', which seeks to include both the tacit knowledge of practitioners and the 'lived experience of service users' (Glasby and Beresford, 2006, p. 268). A fully rounded understanding of later life must include the views, insights and experiences of older people.

By means of an Action Research strategy, this research project has sought to address the perception within the local congregation that there is a need to develop the work done with older people in the church and wider community. The aims for this research project were:

- to enable members of the church community to develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing older people in this context;
- to develop and implement some specific actions that will address these issues;
- and to reflect on and evaluate these actions.

From the beginning it was hoped that the research project would:

- have a positive impact on the lives of older members of the church and community;
- raise awareness of the needs of older people;
- grow mutual understanding amongst members of the congregation;
- involve participants in developing the project and planning further stages;

- and generate insights that will make a contribution to knowledge and scholarship, and which will be of particular significance for practitioners (e.g. clergy and pastoral workers) seeking to work with older people in similar contexts.

Outcomes

This research project is about three things. One strand is concerned with investigating the actual needs of those who are old. This is an under-researched area of practical theology especially given the age profile of many congregations, so this project seeks to extend the practical theological thinking about older age. The lived experience of ageing has been investigated through focus groups and the content of the course that was designed and implemented through a participative action research process. The second strand concerns the research process itself which explores the use of action research as a tool for practical theology. Within this strand is an exploration of how action research has been adopted or adapted by other practical theologians or employed in church settings. The testing of action research in a complex and extended research project contributes to the theory and practice of practical theology research. The third strand concerns reflection on the pastoral practice of Church of England parish ministry and the role of clergy within that context. Woven in with these three strands is a theological discussion arising from the practical engagement with the issue of ageing, with the research process and the practice of ministry.

The question that initiated the research asked whether the church could do more for older people in our community. The answer that the research found was to bring older people together in community to explore and reflect on their experience of growing older

and their identity as older people. In a way this presents a process answer to a needs based question; the process of the research, the *action* of the action research, revealed the prejudice of the needs based approach. This challenges society's dominant deficit based conception of what it means to grow old.

Part 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 1.

ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL CONTEXT

This chapter locates the research project in its academic and practical context. First, within the field of Practical Theology. Second, in terms of personal and professional practice. Third, within the framework and philosophy of the professional doctorate.

Locating this project within the field of Practical Theology

PT is an umbrella term beneath which shelters a wide range of approaches and methods; there may be as many as 1440 different expressions of PT (Ganzevoort, 2009). This 'multivalent nature' of PT has generated a range of definitions for the discipline depending on the audience and objectives (Miller-McLemore, 2012, p. 101). The core qualifying terms 'Pastoral' and 'Practical' have different historical backgrounds and can sometimes be used interchangeably. The first, older term tends to be used in relationship to church based care and organization. The second more recent term emerged from the structuring of the theology curriculum in the late eighteenth century and, is now preferred in Britain since it suggests a vision of theology that is wider than the church community (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, pp. 1-7; Miller-McLemore, 2014, p. 5). Seeing this research project as an exercise in Pastoral Theology would be entirely appropriate; the motivation and initial focus for this project was church-based and related to the organization of the church's care offered to its community. However, the wider vision of Practical Theology and its more common usage within the discipline makes that the more apt term.

Within the wider field of Pastoral and Practical Theology (PT) this study is located as an *interdisciplinary, interpretation and critical reflection on lived experience* leading to *renewed practice*. All these terms require some expansion and definition.

Interdisciplinary

As a discipline, PT is characterised by interdisciplinary engagement (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, p. 11; Cahalan and Mikoski, 2014, p.4). Part of the theological method of PT is to use the insights and methodologies of other academic disciplines. PT engages with and draws upon other theological fields including biblical studies and systematic theology. It also engages with disciplines which are not overtly theological. PT has a long history of drawing on the insights of psychology and psychotherapy, and in more recent years has drawn on anthropology, hermeneutics and social science amongst many others. Such engagement is both critical and appreciative. This research project draws on gerontology, action research, and asset based community development as partners in a 'critical conversation' bringing sources of insight and understanding (Pattison, 2000, pp. 135-145).

Interpretation

The discipline of PT recognizes the importance of hermeneutics and skills of interpretation in the task of Practical Theological Reflection (PTR). Since the 'hermeneutical turn' away from the clerical paradigm of hints and tips for ministry PT, the interpretation of

the 'living human document' has been very much at the heart of PT (Pattison and Lynch, 2005, p. 408; Gerkin, 1984). There is an awareness that hermeneutical commitments guide every reading of a text or situation, every practice engaged and every theory developed. Part of this awareness is that there is no innocent or naïve access to reality and that our interpretations are made from a particular standpoint including our power. There is also an awareness of genre and how different texts and narratives need to be approached differently if they are to be interpreted skilfully (Cahalan & Mikoski, 2014, p. 5). Pastoral theological work with older people has always involved listening to the stories of their lives and helping them to make sense and find meaning in their own life and faith story. But this research project is also about trying to interpret the experience of ageing in our present society and to see what meaning can be made on a community level.

Critical Reflection on Lived Experience

PT is a critical and reflective discipline and reflecting theologically on lived experience is one of the key starting points for practical theological research and for pastoral practitioners. In this sense PTR is a way of doing theology that is 'attentive to lived faith' (Miller-McLemore, 2012, p.108). It is this reflective method and attentive disposition that is the hallmark of PT as it relates theory and practice in complex and fluid ways. Attention to practice means that PT is situated, contextual and local (Schreiter, 1985). It is grounded in 'real-life situations', it embraces the 'inescapable fact that human beings live in particular times, places and cultures'. So, central to PT today is an awareness and 'emphasis on race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation arising from the situated and embodied

character of human life' (Cahalan & Mikoski, 2014, p. 3). It is this that motivates practical theologians to engage in empirical research as a way of accessing and understanding this lived human experience in context. This research project responds to a particular concern in one church and community by trying to understand better and respond more effectively to the needs of older people in this place. The lived experience of ageing is not generic even if there are common issues and challenges to be faced. Different people respond to this life experience in widely different ways and so this project did not seek to develop a one-size-fits-all response.

Renewed Practice

PT is action orientated and aims to lead to transformed or renewed practice; it is a 'transformational activity' (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, pp. 13-14; Graham, 1996). The concept of practice is not strictly limited to action but also includes other elements of human experience such as perception, intention, aesthetics and the practices of 'lived religion' (Mager, 2014, pp. 255-265). It is also important to clarify that action or practice can be personal and corporate; this research project includes personal reflections on my professional practice, on individual and group experiences and it aims to change that professional practice and the corporate practice of the church community. In aiming to make a difference to people and situations PT is committed, interventionist, constructive and pragmatic. The commitment to practice means that PT seeks to move beyond understanding and explanation towards action in the light of reflection. This is an orientation that PT shares with Action Research (AR) which is also committed to developing

new practice in real life situations. AR is focussed on problem solving and on shaping the actions of practitioners. For AR it is in making changes to a situation that the real issues can be understood. AR is therefore always interventionist but this is understood as part of the research process and is itself a provisional action which will necessarily be adapted in the light of what is learnt from the action. AR is introduced more fully in Chapter 3.

PT's aim of transforming practice is theologically rooted in teleology and eschatology; its horizon is the vision of eschatological promise and its purpose and hope is 'integration, reconciliation, human flourishing and peace' (Cahalan and Mikoski, 2014, p. 6). PT is therefore aware of the now-and-not-yet tension that is always part of claiming Christian hope in God's purposes for all creation whilst attending closely to the concrete actuality of existence in the present. The approach of this project has drawn on the ideas of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) which approaches situations with the perspective of building on what is strong, and not what is wrong, in a community. Its premise is abundance rather than scarcity. This optimistic, realistic attitude gives expression to the hope and confidence in the future that comes from a standpoint of faith. The theological rooting of practices and their transformation is vital if the work of bringing about change is to be more than improvement at the technological level. PT recognizes that all human practices are value- and theory-laden (Browning, 1983, p. 6). The *telos* of PT is not just for individuals and communities to be more effective but for them to be more faithful participants in the purposes of God (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, chapter 1).

Context, Myself and the Background to the Project

One other key element and value of PT is that of the practical theologian being 'self-reflective and self-identified': 'Researcher and research function in a dialectical continuum in which both are in play' (Cahalan and Mikoski, 2014, pp. 6-7). Influenced by post-modern insights, PT does not claim objectivity; it seeks to identify and give account of its commitments and agendas. What we see arises from our biases and pre-commitments so those involved in PT take ethical responsibility for the way we position ourselves in our work. Self-awareness and intentional reflexivity are key to this ability to position ourselves and be alert to our part in the research dynamics. Reflexivity involves examining oneself, as it were, 'from the outside' to foster greater self-understanding; bringing into awareness one's own values, assumptions, limitations, personal preferences and dispositions (Bolton, 2010, pp. xix, 14; Thompson, 2008, p. 133). A consequence of this commitment to being self-reflective and self-identified is that, contrary to the usual convention of avoiding the first-person pronoun in academic writing, in both action research based and practical theology dissertations 'I' and 'we' are used where appropriate. This is done as a way of articulating the 'positionality' of the researcher (Herr and Anderson, 2005), to reflect the 'extended epistemology' of this kind of inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2013), and to own the agency of the actors in the action research. In professional doctorates this mode of writing is appropriate to reflect the integration of the academic and personal knowledge developed the experiential learning that is part of practitioner research (Scott *et al.*, 2004). In practical theological reflection, it is a way of acknowledging how 'the commitments of the writer are part of the academic process' (Ward, 2008, p. 14). It is, therefore, appropriate at this stage

of the introduction to make a kind of declaration of interest on my part as the person seeking to research my own professional practice within the community I serve.

The parish of Bournville, in Birmingham, is comprised primarily of the housing estate built from 1895 onwards as a model village by George Cadbury around the Cadbury Brothers' chocolate factory. Although themselves Quakers, the Cadbury brothers recognized that the residents of their model village would include people belonging to different denominations including the Church of England. The church is located centrally in the village and attended by a wide age range of local people; the relational model of pastoral ministry is typical of a Church of England parish church (Cameron, 2010, pp. 23-26; E. Percy, 2014). There is one church building with a community centre attached and a wide range of connections to the local community.

Bournville Parish has a population of about 8,000 and is part of a council ward with 20% more older people and 17% more pensioners living alone than the Birmingham average. It also has more 60-65 year olds than almost any other ward in the city, with an increasing number of retired people. Mapping work by the Church Urban Fund has rated Bournville Parish in the top 25% most deprived parts of the country with a significant aspect of this being pensioner poverty.¹ Birmingham as a city is being hit by a variety of political circumstances that are rapidly reducing social care and security for vulnerable people and especially older people. In recent years, austerity measures have led to cuts in council social

¹ This data is available from the Church Urban Fund website, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation Bournville ranks 3,212 out of 12,606 parishes in England, where 1 is the most deprived. (<http://www2.cuf.org.uk/parish/520062> accessed 20 June 2016)

care and universal services (like libraries, neighbourhood centres and parks) and this will continue for the foreseeable future. There is a need to find ways of preparing individuals and communities to use all the resources at their disposal to remain well, active and mutually supportive for as long as possible. At the same time, older people are often physically healthier than in times past, and many retire with energy and enthusiasm. Older people are an asset to the community and can offer a lot.

I am a white British male, middle-class and now in middle-age, married with children and ageing parents. I have been the Vicar of Bournville since 2002 and since 2008, as a church community, we have been exploring how we might develop the work done in and through the church with older members of the church and wider community. The issue of the church's work with older people was first raised at a parish conference at which we were discussing what our priorities should be for the coming few years. One participant stated that, "We are not doing enough for older people"; many people agreed. However, when the follow up question was asked, "If we are not doing enough for older people, what is the more we need to do?", there were no responses that met with any consensus. It was out of this strategic planning discussion that the initial research question arose: how can we develop our work with older people in our church and community? For me, the motivation behind the research is a commitment to developing the pastoral ministry of the church in this parish in ways that are effective and that involve the members of the church.

It has been especially important in the ethical review of this project to be alert to the power issues that arise from my being a minister researching my own congregation. We have also had to be aware of issues that arise for a church seeking to work with its local

community in an open way such that faith commitment is not a requirement or expectation for other participants. Although a practice of reflexivity encourages one to stand outside oneself so as to be aware and self-critical, in terms of being a researching professional it is not possible to be outside the research context; my own presence, preferences and priorities have influenced the actions we have taken and the way the data has been interpreted. My personality type tends to express a preference for detached observation, planning and developing strategies; my natural inclination is towards abstract thought and systematic analysis and the AR process has been helpful in facilitating the movement towards action and engagement.

Locating this project within a Professional Doctorate

There has been a 'widespread development of professional doctorates in the UK' since the introduction of the EdD in 1992, with the Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) starting in 2006, and the DPT programme at The University of Birmingham starting in in 2008 (Scott *et al.*, 2004, pp. 2-6; Graham, 2007; Bennet and Lyall, 2014). Professional doctorates are focussed on the candidate's work context and professional practice. The doctoral programme develops understanding of context and practice through reflection, critical enquiry and engagement with academic knowledge. Through a process of working from 'practice to theory to practice', new theory is developed. In this there is both a contribution to knowledge and wider impact especially with regard to effecting change in the professional work base of the candidate. The impact of the research includes professional growth and development and sharing of best practice. Where a traditional PhD might take a more

theoretical overview of a subject with the aim of preparing the candidate for a career in academic research, a professional doctorate has a work-related focus; 'If the traditional PhD is intended to develop professional researchers then the professional doctorate appears to be designed to develop researching professionals' (Bourner *et al.*, 2000, p. 219).

The philosophical underpinnings of the Birmingham DPT, as given in the course handbook, draw on Eden and Huxham's discussion of the characteristics of Action Research (2002, p. 269; see also 1996, pp. 75-86). These characteristics distinguish the DPT from other kinds of research degree and define its outcomes and processes. The first distinguishing characteristic is that of involvement by the researcher in the situation with intent to bring about change. In relation to outcomes, despite its contextual grounding, the research envisaged by the DPT has a level of generality with implications beyond the situation being researched and with the possibility of developing theories in relation to other situations and informing other contexts.

So, a second characteristic is the development of theory understood as the 'careful *characterization and conceptualisation of experience*' (Eden and Huxham, 2002, p. 257 italics original). The DPT values, elaborates, and develops theory, alongside and not mutually exclusive to the intent to bring about change. The development of theory as a research outcome goes beyond the immediate practitioner concern of improving efficiency or effectiveness. This is an important marker of the professional doctorate approach which is concerned with the development of professional knowledge and not just practitioner knowledge (Graham, 2007, p. 305). Where the design of tools is part of the research process then it is not enough for these to be the only expression of the research's generality, but

they must be explicitly related to the theories which both inform their design and were developed through the action research.

The type of theory that emerges from practical theological action research is one that has been developed and elaborated from practice; it is an 'emergent theory' which is developed from a synthesis of research data and the practice of the theory that formed the intention of the research. Characteristically this theory-building is incremental: 'moving through a cycle of developing theory-to-action-to-reflection-to-developing theory from the particular to the general in small steps' (Eden and Huxham, 2002, p. 260). This inductive methodology based on the dialectic between theory and practice is familiar to PT in the forms of the pastoral cycle and Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Wijsen *et al.*, 2005; Moon, 2000, pp. 24-30). There is a 'practicality criterion' that is also characteristic of practical theological action research. What is important here is to hold together both description and prescription; for 'description will be prescription, even if implicitly so' (Eden and Huxham, 2002, pp. 260-1).

A further characteristic of good quality practitioner based research is a high level of systematic method and rigour in reflection. The results of the data analysis and theory development cannot be done by intuition alone and intuitive insights need to be informed by methods of exploration that are replicable or, at least, explicable to others. The writing about of the research outcomes is an important part of theory exploration and development (Eden and Huxham, 2002, pp. 262-3). In addition, it is noted that the value of practitioner-based research lies in the theories that emerge from the reflection and data collection process that cannot be accessed through other approaches. The development of theory

through practitioner research is enhanced by opportunities for triangulation that other methods do not offer. The context for the intervention is critical to the interpretation of the data and has implications for the applicability of any results. Where theory generated through practitioner research is of general value it should be accessibly communicated to an audience wider than those integrally involved with the research actions (Eden and Huxham, 2002, pp. 264-7).

Summary Conclusion

This research project has grown out of the concerns of members of the local church community: it is ecclesially rooted. The commitment and faith of the local church members has given motivation, intent and focus to the research as, together, we have sought to develop new responses to ageing in this place. There are implicit and explicit theological concerns running through the research. The research is an attempt to answer questions concerning our church's pastoral care of older members of the church and our engagement with older members of the wider community in the parish we are commissioned to serve.

The origins and nature of the project, along with my own interest in PT and my professional commitment to my continuing ministerial education, led to it being undertaken in the form of the Birmingham DPT. This has given a framework within which the project can be carried out with both rigour and care. This introduction has located the research within PT as an interdisciplinary, interpretive and critical reflection on lived experience leading to renewed practice.

As the clergyperson with primary responsibility for the pastoral care of this church and entrusted with the 'cure of souls' of the parish, this project has involved me in reflecting and researching my professional practice as well as seeking to develop a community level response. The next chapter explores themes of ageing and parish ministry.

CHAPTER 2.

AGEING AND PARISH MINISTRY

The aim of this chapter is to situate the research project within the literature on ageing and parish ministry. As a background to reflecting on pastoral practice it summarises some of the current theories of ageing. Ageing is a social as well as biological process so this summary of understandings of ageing also reflects on the human experience of growing old. Parish ministry is the location of my professional practice and members of the local church and wider community provided the inspiration for the project as well as becoming participants and co-researchers in it.

Understanding Human Ageing and Old-Age

Biological ageing is a process that happens to all human beings as it does in different ways to all living things. There are extensive accounts of theories of ageing in Arking (2006) and Bengston *et al.* (2009), but all theories of senescence (biological ageing) in some way describe the decrease in efficient functioning of the organism with age. Ageing happens as a result of natural processes and not from abnormal processes such as pathology or disease and it is distinguished from other biological changes by five characteristics, it is: cumulative; universal; progressive; intrinsic; and deleterious (Strehler, 1977, pp. 12-16; Arking, 2006), though Arking has questioned whether it is helpful to include universality as a defining

factor. His summary definition is of 'ageing as the *time-independent* series of *cumulative, progressive, intrinsic, and deleterious* functional and structural changes that usually begin to manifest themselves at reproductive maturity and eventually culminate in death' (Arking, 2006, p. 11).

There is no one simple concept of ageing nor its causes. A summary of the consensus around current theories is that biological ageing appears to be a 'lifelong accumulation of faults' at the cellular and molecular level, each a random occurrence insignificant on its own but combining to overwhelm the body's ability to keep its systems running (Kirkwood, 2010). Many of the accounts given of how the body ages are versions of what are termed 'wear-and-tear' and 'failure to repair' theories. The transition from health to senescence is not biologically programmed. Unlike in the developmental stages of life, when many events are regulated by signals from nerves or hormone secreting glands, there is no hormonal or genetic regulation to ensure that ageing happens in certain tissues at certain times. Ageing appears to be an unregulated side effect of the bodies inability to maintain function at the later stages of life (Partridge, 2010). From the perspective of evolutionary biology this can be explained by the 'disposable soma' theory that natural selection has favoured a human body that is basically good enough to get it through a thirty-year life span sufficient for our early ancestors to reproduce (Kirkwood, 1999, pp. 63-80). In evolutionary terms, we age because there is no reason for us not to.

Biological ageing happens at the cellular level. Proposing an integrated model of ageing, Arking (2006, pp. 360-362) summarises various senescent mechanisms that play a major or minor role including: altered proteins; somatic mutation; DNA damage and DNA

repair; dysdifferentiation; free radicals; waste accumulation; post-translational protein changes; metabolic mechanisms; genetic mechanisms; signalling mechanisms; neuroendocrine; and immunological. These 'stochastic' (randomly occurring) causes underlie the systemic understandings of the ways in which bodies age and account for the widely varying ways in which individuals age: 'cell senescence is likely to contribute to the deterioration in many cells observed in many tissues as they age'. As well as muscle wasting and skin deterioration, ageing has a deleterious effect on all the major systems of the human body: the cardiovascular system; the nervous system; the immune system; as well as major organ function (Cox *et al.*, 2014, pp. 48-64).

The disposable soma theory suggests that, as animals, human beings are not designed for old age. However, one of the distinctive characteristics of humans, along with a few other more social mammals, is the survival of the adult beyond reproductive age coupled with a relatively long period of dependency in the infant and juveniles of the species. This human characteristic leads Gutmann (1988) to propose a species level developmental view of ageing, the 'parental imperative', that explains the importance of a long period for the grandparent generation who contribute to the complex socialisation and development of the young. This evolutionary advantage of human longevity has been termed the 'Grandmother Effect' (Hawkes, 2004, pp. 128-9), and Kirkwood also makes the case for the evolutionary advantage of the menopause and grandmothers in terms of ensuring the survival of offspring and their offspring as being more effective than the risk of childbirth in later life (Kirkwood, 2008, p. 126).

Gutmann's hypothesis is that the evolutionary success of the human species is based on how our brain development favours 'new learning' above automatic or instinctive knowledge. Human infants are totally vulnerable and tremendously gifted and in both areas are dependent upon the nurture of their parents until reaching a level of maturity (p. 187). Parenthood is a 'chronic emergency' which undercuts the 'individual's narcissistic illusions of omnipotentiality' as the new parents invest in their offspring's survival and future (pp. 194-6). Narcissism is transformed as young women and men become mothers and fathers. But the parental emergency cannot be met by the biological parents alone; the parents themselves need to be nurtured. In our distinctively human parenting practices the role of the elders is 'to maintain the institutional and cultural frameworks of effective parenting' (p. 7). In the post-parental stage older adults, reclaim the powers they relinquished as parents and assume new social roles as emeritus parents; women (reclaiming assertiveness/aggression) become the matriarchs ruling the extended family (chs. 6&7) and men (reclaiming nurturing) tend the culture and the sacred (ch. 9). The elders support the culture that protects the child. This suggests a biological species level adaption that has possible implications for the social understanding of ageing.

Social

Although ageing is a biological reality for all living things, for human beings the lived experience of ageing is also socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Bytheway, 1981, p. 347; Wilson, 2000, p. 6). The perception of social gerontology is that, as human beings, we come to recognize ourselves and others as being old through interpersonal

processes and social constructions. These are not universal but dependent on cultural and social context; in what follows I focus on Western society and primarily the UK context (Thane, 2000; Johnson, 2004).

The wide-sweeping socio-cultural factors shaping the construction of ageing include modernisation especially the shift towards technological knowledge and away from traditional wisdom; urbanisation and in particular the migration away from the place of birth in order to gain access to wealth independent of inherited property or land; and secularisation bringing with it the devaluing of the sacred. The predominance in the West of the overlapping assumptions of scientific rationalism and capitalist economics, have shaped an understanding of human value in terms of being rational and productive. There is a corresponding tendency not to value those groups of people who are less rational and less productive (Jones and Jones, 2003, p. 186).

At an interpersonal level it is the way in which people behave towards each other that tells them their age. The ways in which we celebrate birthdays with a strong element of ritual create in us an awareness of our own ageing. At a social level, regulation through certain prohibitions and permissions, rights and responsibilities, access to certain benefits, is strongly linked to chronological age. These often define a person's age category, and those towards the end of life define a person as 'old'. In contemporary Britain, a key marker of the transition into old age is retirement; the terms 'pensioner' and 'older person' are synonymous. This is a feature of modern industrial societies where the life course of the person can be broken down into pre-work, work and post-work phases. So chronological old age starts at 60 or 65; the retirement age set for bureaucratic reasons relating to the

administration of pensions (Vincent, 2003, pp. 9-10). At a cultural level, there are several ways of defining the point at which 'old age' begins but 'old age always ends in death' (Vincent, 2003, p. 131). Old age is always the period of life before death and is 'understood to a significant extent through the anticipation of death, and is constructed in relation to the ways in which death is understood' (Vincent, 2003, p. 132). It is also arguable that our human experience and interpretation of death is socially constructed and much of human psychology and culture is shaped by the attempt to face our fear of the end of life (Becker, 1973; Bauman, 1992).

A key insight from social critical gerontology is that ageing is predominantly defined in negative terms; much theorizing about ageing is itself ageist (Bytheway, 1995). This reflects and reinforces widespread discrimination against, ill-treatment and negative perceptions of older people (Palmore *et al.*, 2005). One contribution towards anti-ageist practice is to be positive about older people and to emphasise the benefits of ageing, though without promoting idealized scenarios and unreal beliefs (Bytheway, 1995, p. 128). An influential attempt to reframe the experience of ageing is that of Laslett (1996), who defines the 'Third Age' as a time of fulfilment in the post-work, post-parental stage of life. A key part of the 'fresh map of life' that Laslett describes is the attitudinal shift in that the majority now expect to live into old age and consider death as something that occurs in later life.

How ageing and old age is to be understood varies widely with social factors such as 'class, gender, family structure, employment opportunities, retirement opportunities, and available health care' (Cahill and Mieth, 1991, p. vii). With this variety of how the identities of older people are to be described, Latimer points out the 'absurdity, yet inescapability, of

the category “older people”. Older people are being treated as *a group*’ (Latimer, 1997, p. 143 [italics original]). The experience of old age as a category is a social and economic construction which masks difference. Her response is to work with the notion of older people as what she terms a ‘lived category’. Ageing is not a homogenous experience. One objective of contemporary approaches in social gerontology is to deconstruct the elderly population into component parts and to describe the diversity. Part of what this requires in the new post-modern, post-industrial context is a new elaboration of the vocabulary of ageing in contrast to the previous traditional and static modes (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989, p. 155).

Summary Conclusion: A working definition for this research project

The range of definitions of ageing including biological, chronological and social combined with the heterogeneity of experience of what it is to grow old presents a problem of definition in relation to those with whom this research project seeks to engage. The literature identifies three cohort groups: Pre-Senior (55-64) who might be working and independent; Senior or Third Age (65-80) who might be retired and independent; and the Older Frail or Fourth Age (80+) who might be more dependent (Collyer, 2008, p. 5). The research project began by inviting people who were interested in developing the church’s work with older people, which to a certain extent avoided identifying the interested parties as belonging to a particular category. As the project proceeded it became clear some people were put off by the term ‘older people’, perhaps not wishing to identify themselves as being old. When we publicly invited people to participate as hosts we moved to a chronological

category asking for people who were over 55 (e.g., see the poster included in Appendix 4). As mentioned above, with regard to the limitations of the research, we decided at an early stage not to focus on issues relating to those who had become frail or dependent (Fourth Age), where responses might more appropriately consist of provision of health or social care beyond our resources. The research project was broadly designed to focus on those who are aged over 55, in the post-parental/post-work stage of life, or in the Third Age of life.

Ordained Ministry in a Local Church

Church of England Parish Ministry: the context for pastoral practice

As a Church of England vicar, the parish – the local area, its people and church building – is the context for my professional practice. This research project is about developing an understanding of ageing as a lived experience for particular people, and developing ways in which a local church can enable people in that experience to live as fully as possible. As part of a professional doctorate the project has focussed on my own practice and in particular how, in my role as vicar, I can develop the pastoral work of the church in the area of ministry with older people. However, I have tried to be clear that this is not a congregational study or church development project. Insights from the congregational studies branch of PT have informed parts of this study but that has not been the focus of this project (Hopewell, 1987; Rendle and Mann, 2003; Fulkerson, 2007). Because of the focus on researching my own practice, what follows concentrates primarily on my role as an ordained parish priest in the

Church of England and is intended as a description of my role in that wider professional context. Within the project I was the lead researcher but part of the process was to form a team of church members to lead the research and to create a supportive community for people to share with one another their experience of ageing.

Local ministry in the Church of England is rooted and grounded in the parish system: a geographical area, with a church building or other worship centre as the place for people to gather, and served by a licensed, usually ordained minister. That minister shares with the Diocesan Bishop, the 'cure of souls' for the people of that place: in the licensing service the Bishop says to the newly inducted priest, "receive this cure which is both yours and mine." The parochial system ensures that every part of the country has its own church and minister and is not the same as parishes (Carr, 1985, pp. 60-61). This is still the official and legal structure for the Church of England, even if in some areas it is under strain and the boundaries that demarcate parishes do not necessarily mean much in practice.

Historical and sociological factors have shaped and reshaped the form and structure of parish ministry particularly with regard to funding of parish churches and clergy stipends and also in relation to the social position and day-to-day tasks of the clergy (M. Percy, 2006b). Nevertheless, where it still works (and it seems to in Bournville) this is the place from which local ministry starts. The concepts that underpin pastoral parochial ministry are, then: locality; community; relationship; accountability; service; and mission.

As the established national church, local Church of England churches exist for their parish; that is, it is not intended to be a congregational system but one which serves the whole neighbourhood in which it is located. In this way parish ministry is intentionally

contextual; seeking to be embedded in a local culture and to be responsive to local circumstances. Church of England churches are legally required to provide certain services to people by virtue of their being resident in the parish. Churches once had the status of excepted charities but many are now registered with the Charity Commission: the charitable aim of Bournville Parish Church is 'the provision of public worship open to all.'

Parish based ministry is not congregational but one of its key tasks is that of building up the community of those who attend worship. Some people in the Church of England are averse to the language of membership and yet it is an ecclesologically appropriate term for people who are participants in the church community: members of the body of Christ. Because corporate worship is the core activity of the church, those who gather for worship week-by-week form the core group of people relating to one another and to the minister or ministry team. Gathering together for worship, prayer, learning, service and table fellowship have been core activities for Christians since the earliest church (Acts 2.46-47; Harris, 1989). The pilgrim people of God, the fellowship of faith, the family of God, and being sheep of the fold are metaphors that give expression to the communal nature of the church. Baptism as the rite of initiation is a sacrament of belonging as much as believing (Church of England, 1995, pp. 63–64: paras 4.41–4.42). The liturgical role of the priest in relation to the people is one of presiding over the assembly: the gathered people of God (Hovda, 1976).

In a pastoral model of church one of the defining factors is that members feel they have a sense of relationship with their vicar. This is not as close a sense as in a smaller church in which it can feel like the minister is chaplain to an individual or their family. In the pastoral model there is an experience of being part of a wider network even though the

sense of belonging is dependent on the personal and pastoral relationship with the minister. The number of relationships that one minister can maintain is, therefore, a key limiter to the size of such a church; usually reckoned to be between 100-150 adult members (Mann, 2001). Bournville Parish Church falls within the top of that size range and my model of ministry is very much that of being a liturgical pastor. Relationships of friendship and care between members of the church community are also key and another part of the vicar's role is to facilitate the building up of the fellowship.

In the Church of England, the leadership of the local church is entrusted to individual ministers (Rectors, Vicars, Priests-in-Charge, Incumbents, Chaplains, are some of the main job titles) who are licensed to their post by the Bishop who has the responsibility of oversight. Leadership is a contested concept in the church but the arguments about the models of leadership, values and implicit values ought not to disguise the reality that most clergy are in positions where they have responsibility for shaping vision, managing budgets and making decisions about a wide variety of things. There are structures of accountability including Canon Law (Canons, 2000), the Ordinal (Church of England, 2007), Codes of Conduct (Convocations of Canterbury and York, 2015; Harrison and Innes, 2016), Deanery Chapters, and frameworks for ministerial review (Archbishops' Council, 2010). Many clergy also create their own informal support networks and relationships with spiritual directors, work consultants, pastoral supervision and cell groups. Clergy are not meant to operate in isolation but within a network of affirmation and accountability. One of the pressures on clergy in positions of primary responsibility is the range of people and structures to whom one is accountable. In his work *Managing God's Business*, Torry lists: 'the denomination, a particular theological tradition, normative texts, hierarchical authority structures,

congregational office-holders, congregational members, civic leaders, civil institutions, local residents – and God’ (Torry, 2005, p. 139).

The value of service shapes and guides much pastoral ministry.² Many local churches, including Bournville Parish Church, seek to serve their communities in different forms of practical care including community centres, schools, and foodbanks. This is a model of helping and meeting needs. The ethic of service is often theologically justified in terms of being like Christ who ‘came not to be served but to serve’ (Mark 10.45) and who ‘emptied himself and took the form of slave...’ (Philippians 2.5-11). Yet this justification is open to critique since it often leads to unhealthy patterns of ministry. Other more collaborative models of working and relating are valid; Jesus also said to his disciples that he no longer called them servants but friends (John 15.15).

If the church is to be understood theologically in terms of incarnation, then it could be said that it is in parish ministry that the church takes flesh. The local church is where people gather to encounter God in worship and one another in fellowship. It is the place where people relate to their clergy who seek to build relationships of mutual trust and to provide care that does not foster dependency but helps them to grow to maturity in Christ. This relationship building is a skilled work which, though easily undervalued, is central to ordinary parish ministry (E. Percy, 2014). Many parish churches, like St Francis Bournville, have wide connections with people from the parish who are not members of the church. Some warm

² The Greek word *Diakonia* is often translated ministry and has in the past been understood to have its etymology in service, more recently it has been convincingly shown to mean commissioned task (Collins, 1990; Gooder, 2006), which does not exclude acts of humble service but should not be limited to them.

contacts come through the traditional occasional offices of christenings, weddings and funerals. Other connections come through the work of church schools and community centres.

The Church of England's theology of mission is rooted in the historic Declaration of Assent which affirms that it is part of the 'One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church', that it is Trinitarian, and that it professes the Christian faith as revealed in scripture and set out in the creeds. It is this faith that the church is 'called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation' (Church of England, 2000, xi). This last phrase was the source of inspiration for the report *Mission-shaped Church* (Church of England, 2004) which set out a new commitment to mission and in particular to the planting of congregations which are known as 'fresh expressions' of church. Whereas the traditional mode of church is focussed on place and buildings that offer space for worship, the present culture requires us to engage with people where they are forming community in different places. The report recognized that the CofE now operates a 'mixed economy' within which Bournville Parish Church, although mission-minded, is a traditional expression of church with a mission strategy shaped by the commitment to 'doing traditional church really well' (Gamble, 2006, pp. 93-109).

Drawing the terminology of theology in four voices (Cameron *et al.*, 2010, pp. 53-55): the *Normative* Theology of the CofE's mission is in the historic formularies such as the Declaration of Assent; the *Formal* theology of the *Mission-shaped* CofE is that of *missio Dei*:

Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the

movement of God's love towards people, since God is a fountain of sending love (Bosch, 1991, p. 392).

However, the *Espoused* theology of mission is about church growth and so the critique of the *Mission-shaped* agenda and Fresh Expressions movement is that it has ended up as a 'church-shaped mission' (Hull, 2006); the priority of growing the church shifts focus towards a congregational model and away from giving attention to the whole parish (Davison and Milbank, 2010). The *Operant* theology of mission at the local level is, at best, the commitment to serve the community, and offer welcome and hospitality to all who come. This is much more mission understood as *purpose*: the mission of the parish church is to offer public worship open to all, to build up the community of faith and to be there for people in times of celebration and sorrow.

The local church is far from perfect. It is partial. It operates on limited resources and therefore cannot do everything or be all things to all people however much it would like to. The numerical decline in church attendance in England has been well-documented (Jackson, 2002). Yet, in many places parish churches are still able to maintain a prayerful presence in their communities and to offer an expression of the Christian religion that is 'public, accessible and extensive, whilst also being distinct, intensive, and mysterious' (M. Percy, 2006a, 12).

For practical theological research that wants to attend to the lived experience, faith and practice of Christians, the local church and its congregation provide a key focal point. The local church is where Christians gather together for worship, fellowship and reflection. It provides a network of relationships that often goes wider than congregation. There is also

an organisational level that makes possible collective action and structured responses. As someone engaged in researching my practice (for the DPT) the parish church is my professional location; to have researched anywhere else would have taken me away from my practice base.

Parish ministry involves a complex mix of various tasks and responsibilities. These vary from place to place and the priorities of different ministers is determined by them in dialogue with the demands and possibilities of their context. My role, as a parish priest, encompasses being a reflective theological practitioner, pastoral minister to congregation and community, and being responsible for the leadership and management of the church.³ My week-by-week range of tasks include presiding at worship, celebrating occasional offices, visiting people at home or in hospital, attending and chairing meetings, managing budgets, fundraising for projects, schools work, governance of charitable trusts, line-management of staff, supervision and training of other members of the ministry team, managing buildings and overseeing their maintenance, acting as a representative of the church at community events, listening and supporting those who come to the church in search of help, advice or comfort. This non-exhaustive list shows the variety of tasks but also indicates the range of skills that parish ministry requires. The task list also indicates that the role fits the description of the clerical role as 'partially professionalized' (M. Percy, 2006b, p. 112), but shows that it does go far beyond the compressed identity of being 'technologists of the sanctuary' (Russell, 1980, p. 40).

³ 'inquisitive learner', 'wounded companion' and 'creative leader' are just three of the sixteen descriptive titles recently used to express the multidimensional priestly task (Pritchard, 2007, chapters 6,8,12).

The above list of tasks also indicates that, except for work with schools and the running children's and youth groups, there is little age-related ministry. The only activity which is exclusively run for older people is the lunch club in the Community Centre which is primarily led by members of the church and of which I have oversight. Until this project, distinctive ministry with older people was limited to pastoral visiting, celebrations of communion in old peoples' homes, and individual bereavement care as part of funeral ministry. Otherwise, the intention here is to provide ministry that is accessible to people of all ages.

Ageing and the Church: In what ways might the church respond to peoples' lived experience of ageing?

Provision of services

The Christian church's ethic of service, rooted in the teachings of Jesus (such as Matthew 25.40), means that when there is a presenting need there is a strong motivation to respond in ways that will meet that need. There is a long tradition of practical response to the issue of ageing by the provision of services to meet pastoral need. In the fourth century, the church built *gerocomeia* or homes for the aged. Bishops were involved in the oversight of these institutions and John Chrysostom (c.347-407) is known to have built and overseen these charitable institutions (Merchant, 2003, pp. 101-107). The building and running of hospitals and hospices to care for the frail, sick and dying is part of the same tradition and as much an outgrowth of religion as of medicine (Phipps, 1988). More recently church

provision for older people has been in the form of fellowship groups and lunch clubs. Some churches run specific seniors' ministries, with designated ministers responsible for older adults (e.g. Anna chaplaincy to Older People⁴). Churches also often make efforts to provide opportunities for worship in appropriate forms: using familiar prayers, well-known traditional hymns, with comfortable seating and at accessible times of day (Collyer *et al.*, 2008).

Individual pastoral care

Another form of church response to ageing is to offer individual pastoral care. Churches often provide informal networks of support and friendship which can be very positive. Members of churches visit, care for and pray with one another. This can also have more structured and formal expression such as running a befriending or visiting scheme. Such visits and friendships play an important part in any person knowing they are valued and listened to. A deeper need is that of finding meaning in this stage of life; Jewell has demonstrated the significance of a strong sense of purpose in life for older church goers and the positive contribution that religious faith and practice makes to that sense of purpose (Jewell, 1999,2001, 2004, 2010, 2012; Frankl, 1962). The search for meaning in older age can be facilitated by skilled and careful listening offered in the form of pastoral counselling or life review. This is a pastoral model of accompanying someone on their faith and life journey, helping by being with and listening to: '... at such times we may need, above all,

⁴ <http://www.thegiftofyears.org.uk/anna-chaplaincy-older-people> (accessed 23.08.2016)

someone to sit beside us and listen to us, as in however stumbling a way we tell our stories' (Woodward, 2008a, p. 195).

Life stage theory, as proposed by Erikson (1980), suggests that the key task in later life is integration. Erikson's work has been influential especially amongst those thinking about how religious meaning may change or develop throughout the life-course. Erikson sees development happening in eight stages throughout a person's life-time, with each stage having its own developmental challenge.⁵ In the final stage, one faces the crisis of integrity versus despair. In Erikson's theory, integrity is achieved when a person establishes a complete sense that their life has been worthwhile and meaningful. The crisis is resolved successfully if one can reconcile what has been accomplished in life with what one set out to do. The challenge is to accept the kind of person one has become and to find a deeper sense of meaning. This developmental challenge belongs at the end of life and it is suggested that this is part of the reason that as people grow older they turn to religion (Krause, 2006, p. 511).

In Erikson's eighth stage there are three fundamental issues of adjustment in relation to the task of integrity vs. despair. The first is to accept the past without bitterness. The second and third receive less attention in the discussions of Erikson's theory and these are the acceptance of one's own death and the acceptance of the society that will continue after one's own death. Questioning is central to attaining integrity and development happens

⁵ In the Extended Version of *The Life Cycle Completed* a Ninth Stage of Development is proposed by Joan Erikson. This Ninth Stage seeks to 'understand the final life cycle stages through late eighty- and ninety-year-old eyes' (Erikson, 1997, p. 105ff.).

through the tension between integrity and despair. It should not be presumed that this process is gone through serenely. Times of loss, bereavement, doubt and crisis can all challenge people's faith. Whilst people often look to institutionalised religion for continuity and stability it also needs to be a place that gives people space to ask hard questions and express their fears and doubts (Coleman, 2004, p. 107).

Challenge

Reflection on the understandings of old age within Christian tradition might move current practice away from the provision of services designed to meet older peoples' needs. There is a strong tradition that emphasises the continuing vocation of older adults to follow faithfully as disciples of Jesus still growing in faith and love. There is a particular emphasis on those who are elders in the household of faith being role models, moral guides and teachers for younger Christians. The church's ministry with older people should include in some way the challenge to continue living faithfully and growing in holiness.

As noted above Woodward's theology of ageing gives a central role to the idea of life-review through which it is possible to find resolution, reconciliation and discern God's love in the love one has experienced. Salvation consists of wholeness and integration. This is heavily influenced by Erikson's theory and the idea of the integrative task of this stage in the life cycle. It also reflects what Tournier calls the 'inward turn' as one responds to the Jungian call for integration in the second half of life (Tournier, 1972, p. 11). Whilst I do not doubt the value of this for personal well-being, which is part of salvation, it is not the whole story.

There arise questions such as: is there an outward turn that is required of us as we grow old; a stripping of the ego that means that it is not all about us? Is there a gift of ageing such as wisdom that is to be shared? Might the second half of life also be a time of change and growth (as explored in Rohr, 2012)?

Part of a practical theology of ageing needs to be what Lyon terms the 'religioethical witness of age' (Lyon, 1985, p. 47). Drawing heavily on Erikson, Lyon sees fulfilment in ageing as partly resting in the sharing of wisdom. In Erikson's life cycle theory, the dominant psychological challenge of ageing is the conflict of integrity vs. despair, with integrity giving a sense of coherence and wholeness, including acceptance of finitude and limitation (Erikson, 1980; Lyon 1985, p. 99). The successful balancing of integrity and despair is wisdom. A principal characteristic of this wisdom is an integrated heritage or tradition that the older adult lives and conveys to the oncoming generation. Wisdom is not an individualistic achievement but connotes the individual's participation in, and transmission to others of, a wider cultural wisdom. Old age is the witness of a life and one can become a 'life-giving self' contributing to the moral becoming of others. Pastoral care with the aging involves enabling older adults meaningfully and appropriately to care for and contribute to the lives of others even as it enables older adults meaningfully and appropriately to care for themselves (Lyon, 1985, pp. 102-4).

Merchant's study relating to the church in an ageing population also has outward focussed ideas framed in terms of what older people can contribute to the life of the Christian community (Merchant, 2003). Older people bring a strength and wisdom to the household of God as they hold and pass on 'faith, knowledge and memory'; they are the

pioneers who can show others the way of faith (p. 155). Older people have a role in the church as 'beacons of hope' in the way they can show others what is yet to be in their own lives, which can find expression in mentoring relationships (pp. 157-8). Older people have a role in encouraging others to remain steadfast, to persevere and to continue to trust in God, through the witness of Christ's transforming presence in their own lives (pp. 158-9).

Merchant here suggests the recovery of Chrysostom's term 'full age' to signify what Christian living might mean for the older person (p. 159). This begins to turn the discussion towards a Christian ethical practice of growing old. The virtues of ageing might be considered to include gratitude, humility, balance, perspective, openness and flexibility.⁶ A question remains as to how Christian practices foster such virtues?

Enabling and Empowering

There are several key ideas that influenced the response that emerged in this project. The first of these is that of affirming the intrinsic value of older people and seeing them as people with much to contribute to church and society: age is something to be valued and older people are the 'natural spiritual constituency' of the Church (Woodward, 2008a, p. 189). The second is to recognize the real benefits that faith and belonging to a faith community can offer people as they age. The third is to see as an asset the sense of community that exists in the church and the opportunities for building on that to create

⁶ On the virtues of ageing see also (Pinches 2003) and (May 1986).

intentional communities to which people might belong as a way of accessing some of the benefits. The fourth is have the approach of doing things with rather than for people; this is a different ethos to pastoral ministry which along with the other ideas begins to shape an alternative pattern of response (Woodward, 2008a, p. 78).

An increasing number of studies suggest a positive link between religion and health in old age; older adults who are religious enjoy better mental and physical health than those who are not (Koenig *et al.*, 2001). One longitudinal study reported that whilst there were no correlations between religious activity or attitude with longevity, there was a correlation with happiness, feelings of usefulness, and personal adjustment. There was a stronger correlation for religious activity than for attitude leading them to suggest that behaviour is more important than belief (Blazer and Palmore, 1976, p. 85). A UK-based study in this area concluded that 'for British older people with greater degrees of frailty, spirituality and beliefs are a significant direct and moderating resource in maintaining an otherwise lower sense of well-being' (Kirby *et al.*, 2004, p. 128). One of the benefits of church attendance is that it is a 'gateway' into many other aspects of the life of a congregation (Battle and Idler, 2003, pp. 129-30). Research has shown that the 'salubrious effects of religion on health' relate to key religious practices and beliefs including church attendance, prayer, coping responses, forgiveness, social support and relationships that lead to emotional and tangible assistance, meaning in life (Krause, 2006, pp. 499-511).

Religious practice and belonging to a community of faith make a positive contribution to ageing well. This affirms the importance of developing a pastoral strategy around participation in the life, work and worship of the church. The challenge for the church is to

find ways in which the worth of older people can be brought out in the praxis of the church congregation as it builds community between people of all ages. Within the life of the church, what older people give – not what is given to them – needs to be perceived. Pastoral and social care can be done with and through older people and not just for or to them. Structures of participation in that work need to be created for those who have the time, energy, willingness and wisdom to offer. Structures of support also need to be in place for those who become too frail to attend or participate in that way – steadfast company is needed in times of severe illness. Finally the church can offer, although it sometimes fails in this, a welcome and fellowship to older people in contrast to the exclusion they can experience in other parts of society (Blasberg-Kuhnke, 1991, pp. 75-78).

What Might it Mean to Age 'Well'?

As already noted, the original motivation of this research project was to develop the church's ministry with older people in this community. This initial idea developed through the course of the project and the research journey is detailed further below (Chapter 4). Part of that development was a shift away from identifying needs that might in some way be met by the provision of resources and towards enabling local older people to age well. In anticipation of the later discussion and to give some indication of the concluding analysis it is useful at this stage to attempt to clarify some of the underpinning concepts, in particular those of 'well-being' and 'flourishing'. The 'abundant life' or 'life in all its fullness' that Jesus bestows (John 10:10) provides the scriptural basis for seeking the promotion of well-being as a legitimate broad aim of the Christian Church (a detailed exegesis of this passage was too

lengthy to be included within the main text of this dissertation and is presented in Appendix 13).

In 2002, the World Health Organisation (WHO) proposed a multi-dimensional, though strongly health-orientated, model of 'active ageing' which is:

... the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and groups. It allows people to realise their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout their lives and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance. (cited Walker, 2014, p. 253)

Health is a necessary condition for the fulfilling of human goods and goals, however human well-being should not be entirely assimilated within the concept of health (Messer, 2013, p. 4). Messer's ethical and theological critique insists that flourishing is a much broader concept than good health, seeing health as a 'penultimate good' that becomes idolatrous when treated as an 'ultimate end' (2013, p. 181) because it can be seen as a 'secular form of salvation' (p. 206).

The New Economics Foundation work on well-being conceptualises well-being as comprising two elements: feeling good and functioning well (Aked *et al*, 2008, p. 1). A state of well-being is reflected in feelings of happiness, contentment and enjoyment and this definition recognizes the contribution to well-being of having some measure of control over one's life and a sense of purpose. This definition connects with the philosophical ethical understandings of human flourishing beginning with Aristotle's discussions of *eudaimonia*

(usually translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing') which is framed in functional terms (see Pattison and Edgar, 2016a and 2016b; Messer, 2013, p. 39-40).

The contribution to well-being of personal health and effective functioning in the world also form part of Woodward's summary of 'successful ageing' that includes these three elements:

- 1 The absence of disease and disability.
- 2 The maintenance of intellectual and physical functions.
- 3 Engagement with meaningful activities. (Woodward, 2008, p. 201)

This, like the WHO definition, is an understanding of health that is more than just the absence of disease. As a concept it offers a wider social perspective that reflects the contribution of good relationships and self-efficacy to functioning well.

These physiological, psychological and social definitions of well-being need also to be seen in theological perspective. Messer's theses on flourishing contribute to this by drawing on Barth's doctrine of Creation. Here health is a real, although penultimate, good understood as 'strength for life' which is understood as the 'God given ability to answer the Creator's call and live a flourishing human life' (2013, p. 207). As creatures, human beings are addressed by God's liberating command to 'will to be healthy', which is to receive the strength for life that is God's gift of grace. This is the source of the value and worth we attribute to human life and provides our rationale for pursuing the common good, it is this that inspires the church to be a community offering resources of hope and faith in a suffering world.

Surveys of the literature indicate several factors that negatively impact older people's wellbeing include depression, loneliness and isolation, social exclusion, inequalities, poverty and deprivation, poor housing quality, poor physical or mental health, and age discrimination. In addition, certain events and transitions in life can trigger depression: retirement, bereavement, giving and receiving care. Things that positively impact wellbeing include relationships and social life. The most important factors underlying older people's mental health and wellbeing are social and community participation. Other positive social factors include the role in families e.g. grandparenting. Activities that can contribute positively to wellbeing for older people include exercise, education and learning, volunteering, personal resilience, practice of religion, and experiences of respect (Allen, 2008, p. 20-36).

These various definitions and reflections raise the question of what older people themselves might say about what flourishing in later life might look like in their particular context and what practical strategies might be developed to promote well-being.

Summary Conclusion

Research has established that Christian faith and practice have beneficial effects on the health and well-being of people in later life (I would want to claim that it does for every stage of life but the focus of this study is on ageing). That same faith also motivates Christians as individuals and collectively as church communities to engage with those around them offering care and friendship. From the early church to the present day the church has

responded to the issue of ageing in a variety of ways including the provision of social service, individual pastoral care, as well as calling people to holiness and faithful discipleship. In practice, all such care is delivered at the local level by the members and ministers of local churches to the people who are their neighbours. This is the reality of face-to-face care given in relationship; context is a given. The question of how a local church might respond to the issues it faces today is at the heart of this research project: how should this church act at this time, in this place, with these people, facing this issue?

CHAPTER 3.

ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY:

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND ACTION RESEARCH

For this research project, I chose to employ an Action Research (AR) strategy as the way to answer the questions at the end of the last chapter. It has already been noted above (p. 10-11) that AR shares with PT an action orientation and commitment to transforming or renewing practice. The AR process and its relation to PT is discussed in this chapter. Before turning to that I reflect briefly on a question of ethos which suggests why AR is an ethically apt strategy to employ.

Ethos and Ethics: 'For' or 'With'

The approach of doing things with rather than for older people is identified by Woodward as one means of enhancing their autonomy so that they are empowered to live 'as fully and richly as possible' (2008a, p. 78). In a recent work, Wells has articulated this in a fourfold way drawing distinctions between working for, working with, being with, and being for others (Wells, 2015, p. 23). Wells proposes that being with is the theological heart of doctrine and ethics: in the Immanent life of the Trinity the Son and the Spirit are with the Father; Creation makes the context in which God is to be with us; supremely, the Incarnation reveals Jesus as 'Emmanuel' – God with us; and ecclesologically, Church is being with God

(2015, pp. 8-9). Ethically, being with shapes the response of Christians, especially in their response to poverty, it is about genuine encounter leading to engagement. This ethic of being with others gives a basis for pastoral ministry, but it still leaves the question of how in practice a local church might begin a process of encounter and engagement, listening to and learning from the experience of others. Participative Action Research offers one such model and is explored below.

The relationship that exists between myself as investigator and the participants is that I am the Vicar of the church of which they are members. This is both a pastoral and professional relationship, based on trust and the established codes of conduct for members of the clergy. Research into one's own practice raises some specific ethical issues regarding power relations between myself and the participants: I am not just a researcher but also their pastor and, because of my role, a person who has a certain status in the community. One of the strengths of AR, which again makes it an apt approach, is the element of participation as a guiding value. In terms of the research project I am the trained social researcher, however, the AR process put me in the role of a facilitator of members of the church community as they set the agenda, and generated the knowledge that will transform their situation (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 7). The members of the church were not passively having research done to them but were participants working together for the improvement of our collective pastoral practice. Focus groups are an established method used in Participatory Action Research (Chiu, 2003). They are a particularly appropriate method of enquiry in situations where there is a power differential between participants and decision makers (Morgan and Krueger, 1993, p. 15) and have been shown to be appropriate in research with older persons (Liamputtong, 2011, pp. 122-124).

Similarly, I am aware that asking the question of how the church's work with older people can be developed carries with it the danger of making older people the object of the research. The participative AR process and Focus Group method allows those involved in the research (regardless of age) to be the subjects and co-researchers (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, ch. 8 and particularly p. 212). Ethical issues are also particularly important in this research project due to the focus on work with older people who as a vulnerable group may potentially be at risk of inadvertent abuse or exploitation through the research process. Principles of respect, confidentiality and freedom of choice guided the practice of those leading and conducting the research and every effort was made to ensure that all communication and documentation reflected those values.

Participative Action Research

The decision to use this approach was influenced by the need for the project to develop something new, to have a focus broader than just the congregation, to involve members of the church and community in the development, and to have sufficient connection with recognized academic methods to be suitable for the DPT. In a piece of reflective writing (submitted in Part 1 of the DPT) I distinguished between reflective practice and practitioner research. Reflection on practice is good for analysing existing practices and situations, but research is needed to bring about a new engagement with the issues of ageing and the community of the church and to generate new insights out of that process. If we had adopted a model of theological reflection on practice that would have limited us to focussing on existing work within the church and community and would have paid most

attention to my pastoral role.

Another possible approach that could have been used is that of appreciative enquiry (e.g. Rendle and Mann, 2003) which does have some connection with AR (Bradbury Huang, 2010). Employing this method would have emphasised the church development aspects of the project and, since the approach seeks to build on the existing story of a community, may have been less likely to generate new practices. The model of AR is one that is recognized by other academic disciplines including nursing and education, it has some corollary with models of PTR and the hermeneutical cycle, and (as is discussed further below) it has recently attracted positive attention from practical theologians. Despite this interest there have been few published accounts of AR being used in church settings which means that this project has the potential to make a contribution to this area of scholarship.

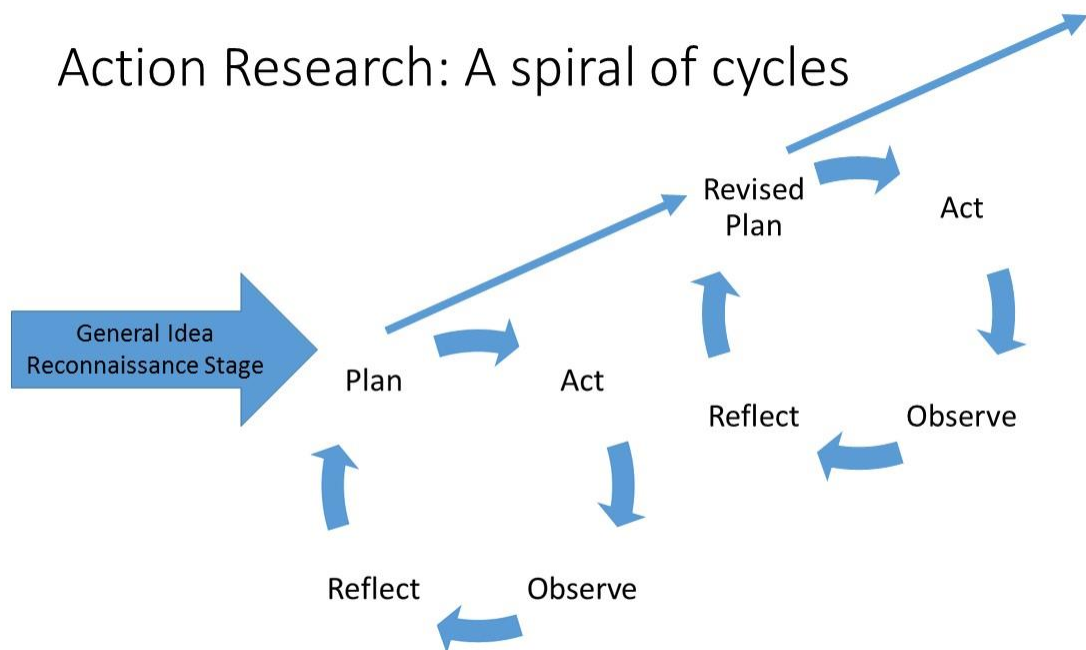
Within the various typologies of AR this project is an example of Participative Action Research (PAR) which aims to improve practice through harnessing the participants' practical wisdom (Grundy, 1982). In this approach the action to be taken is not predetermined by the researcher's initial idea, but rather emerges when the idea interacts with the situation through a process of deliberate reflection. To help ensure that the researcher's self-reflection does not become distorted by self-deception a steering/reflection group can be convened to help guide and support the process. Through AR, it is possible for the research to be carried out in such a way that it is collaborative, focussed on my own development as a practitioner, geared towards the transformation of the practice of the institution in which I operate, and generates new theory and insight.

The research question of ‘How might the perceptions and needs of older people in an Anglican Parish Church be more adequately understood and addressed through an Action Research Strategy?’ is rather open. This research project is unstructured rather than pre-structured (Punch, 2000, p. 41); the project did not begin with a hypothesis to test or with a tightly pre-figured design. The unfolding nature of this research project is also what makes AR an apt way to approach the question. Action Research can be characterized as a ‘research strategy’ rather than a methodology (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 5). In this sense it is an approach to research, a way of structuring and organizing the process of enquiry into a situation. The researcher and the other participants in an action research project may well use a variety of methods to generate new research knowledge.

The Action Research Process

The origins of Action Research (AR) can be traced back to the work of Kurt Lewin in America from the 1940s (Adelman, 1993; Masters, 1995). Lewin’s original AR was a form of problem solving in industry with a strong commitment to democratic participation in the process of change leading to improved practice and the generation of new understanding. The epistemology of AR is that knowledge is embedded in practice and new insight and knowledge is generated through practical action; it is through the actual process of problem solving that the problem is properly understood; one of Lewin’s maxims was that, ‘The best way to understand something is to try to change it’ (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 18). Following Lewin’s original scheme AR can be described as a spiral of steps, with each loop of the spiral having four stages: planning, acting, observing, reflecting. Each loop leads on to

the next step of re-planning, acting, observing and reflecting producing a whole series of steps. The standard action research methodology is thus a 'spiral of cycles' (e.g. Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 29). This can be summarised diagrammatically in this way (e.g. McNiff, 1988, p. 23):



This simple cycle can be revised as suggested by Elliott (1991) in that the general idea needs to be allowed to shift. This means that the reconnaissance stage involves analysis and not just simple fact-finding. Carrying out Action Research in one's own organization – or Insider Action Research – is a well-established practice. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010, Ch. 5 & 6) it requires the researcher to attend to their pre-understandings, the dual role of being a researcher and member of the organization and managing the organizational politics. AR was adopted by education practitioner researchers through the work of McNiff

(1988); and has also been employed in the fields of nursing (Williamson, Bellman and Webster, 2011) and organisational research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

As ways of linking practice and theory there are obvious similarities between the action-reflection cycles of the AR process and the hermeneutical or pastoral cycles of liberation and practical theological reflection (Segundo, 1977; Pattison, 1994; Thompson *et al.*, 2008). However, despite these family resemblances, there is little published work employing Action Research in practical theology or describing the use of Action Research in a church setting. During his time as minister of Parchmore Methodist Church in Thornton Heath, George Lovell worked with his congregation on a pioneering action research study concerning the theological understanding of community and community development (1972). Other references to published work include that of Martin (2000; 2001), a Baptist minister in Canada; Swinton and Mowat reflect on Action Research in their book on Qualitative Research (2016 [2006]); and Cameron *et al.* (2010) propose a model they term Theological Action Research (TAR). Most recently Graham has posed the question 'Is Practical Theology a form of Action Research?' (2013). In previous research, I employed AR to explore faith development in the setting of the relationship between a church and its connected church school (Babington, 2003).

The spiral is not necessarily the best way of depicting the AR process which in practice is often messier. More elaborate diagrammatic representations of the AR process that attempt to capture some of the messiness of the practice of AR whilst still showing the logic have been proposed (e.g. Elliot, 1991, p. 71). However, all such schemes can be criticised on several grounds: that they can be prescriptive rather than descriptive; they can be overly

rigid and unresponsive to dealing with novel situations that arise; they can be too neat compared with the reality of professional practice; often in practice the stages overlap or there is a movement backwards and forwards; and there is not always clarity between the functionalist outcome of problem solving and the generation of new theory grounded in practice. The planning, acting, observing, reflecting spiral is only capable of dealing with one problem at a time. A more accurate scheme needs to allow for spin-off spirals (e.g. McNiff, 1988, pp. 44-45). Participatory AR is not intended as an individual activity and these schemes do not make explicit the ways in which others are involved.

The move of AR from its origins in industry to educational and social settings has led to the model being extended. Townsend (2013) proposes a revised process appropriate for use in situations of professional development and for accredited academic programmes. He recognises that whilst the model is presented as an idealised and rationalised sequence of steps it should be understood as adaptable to the context of the researcher. His approach emphasises that general idea and foci may change in the course of the research and should be kept under review; that the proposed actions are informed by the aspirations of the researcher, their general idea and the evidence that is being gleaned; and that monitoring and observation occur simultaneously with implementation.

Arguably the point of a planning-acting-observing-reflecting metaphorical spiral as proposed by Lewin was to emphasise that AR was different from existing approaches to research (McTaggart, 1994, p. 315). What Lewin proposed, and what is still the central idea of AR is that it is an iterative process through which people can progressively learn from experience. But more than being a learning process, from its beginnings AR has been

grounded in certain values and principles which have shaped its aims and character. Stringer has identified four main characteristics of AR (1999, p. 10):

- It is democratic, enabling the participation of all people.
- It is equitable, acknowledging people's true worth.
- It is liberating, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- It is life enhancing, enabling the expression of people's full human potential.

These characteristics can be seen in an earlier definition of AR:

Action Research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situation in which these practices are carried out... the approach is only action research when it is *collaborative*, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members.

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5 – italics original).

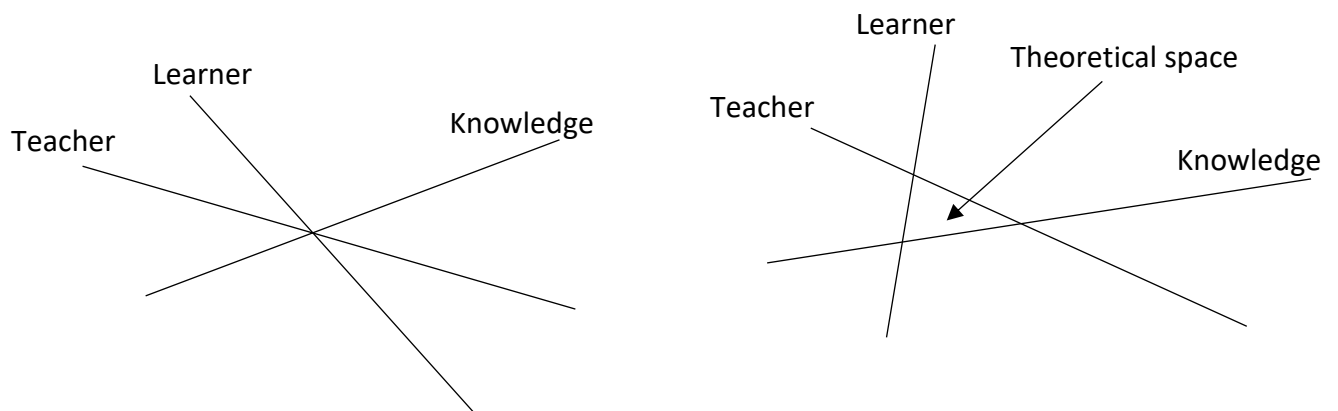
As a counterbalance to overly-instrumental process definitions other guides seek to outline generic principles of AR which can be applied in different contexts. Drawing on the work of Somekh, Somekh and Saunders, and Winter, Townsend proposes eight principles (2013, pp. 34-41):

1. AR is concerned with changing and improving action.
2. AR involves, in some way, research
3. AR is located in professional, cultural and social contexts
4. AR is an inherently participatory process
5. AR is consciously and deliberately reflexive

6. AR is a self-critical and socially critical activity
7. AR is in itself educative
8. Change through AR involves leadership.

Doing AR differently

After a poststructuralist critique of AR, Brown and Jones (2001) seek to set out a way of undertaking AR differently. Their proposal is for what they term 'critical pedagogy' through which they are not seeking to reconcile oppositions such as practice and theory, but rather 'to disturb and dislocate [their] own bounded practices' (p. 100). Brown and Jones start from an understanding of pedagogy put forward by Lusted as addressing that 'transformation of consciousness that takes place at the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they produce together' (quoted in Brown & Jones, 2001, p. 101). They then dislocate that intersection to create an opening or 'theoretical space'. They show this diagrammatically thus (p. 102):



The term 'theoretical space' (from Giroux, cited p.102), is for 'creating a discourse capable of raising new questions, offering oppositional practices and producing fresh objects of analysis'.

This critical pedagogy is a poststructuralist/postmodern expression of AR in education (Brown and Jones research nursery education and children's play). This revised expression of AR has caused me to wonder what labels the lines might be given for this kind of dislocated intersection in a theological rather than an educational setting? For AR being used for practical theological research, the lines might be designated: researcher / participant / theology; or practitioner / clients / knowledge; or parish priest / people / pastoral practices.

One of the understandings of emancipation that emerges from this model is that of a dissolution of boundaries, moving beyond oppositional frames of reference such as insider/outsider, observer/observed. This is particularly helpful when as a researching professional one is deeply immersed in the situation one is seeking to understand and disrupt.

Back to Basics: Action, Research and Participation

My critique of poststructuralist versions of AR and, indeed, TAR, is that they make abstract that which is meant to be grounded and concrete. They are helpful insofar as they keep the AR process from being overly mechanistic and it is right to bring into the foreground beliefs that are shaping practices. However, if action, practical knowledge, and

personal experience become so theorised that ordinary members of an organisation cannot engage with the language or ideas then the over-theoretical reframing of AR becomes counterproductive:

[A]ction research represents *a transformative orientation to knowledge creation in that action researchers seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers*. Action researchers do not readily separate understanding and action, rather we argue that only through action is legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 93).

Greenwood and Levin recognize the differences among practitioners of AR and the diversity of the life situations in which AR is conducted, but they see amongst practitioners shared commitment to action, research and participation: 'AR is composed of a balance of [these] three elements. If any of these is absent then the process is not AR' (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 6). Working with that assertion, and following Elliot's definition of Participatory Action Research (1991), I would affirm that the process of AR is about action in terms of seeking to alter the situation of the community or organisation so that it is improved, made better, or becomes more liberated. It is about research in affirming that there is a value and power in knowledge which can help that process of change and the process itself can be generative of new knowledge and practical wisdom. It is participation that embodies the key AR value of democracy. This leads to ownership, not just of people's life situations, but of the generation of knowledge. People within organisations and communities are the ones who will put the results of the research to work, who will take responsibility for the research outcomes, the success of the process depends upon their

involvement in shaping the agenda and upon their own transformation through growing in knowledge.

One of the strengths of the AR strategy is the flexibility to draw on other methods and approaches as and when needed. One idea that became influential as the research unfolded was that of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) which is introduced further below. The AR values of democratic involvement, participation, and ownership of research process and outcomes all resonate with the approach of ABCD and make possible some interdisciplinary learning.

Asset Based Community Development

ABCD is an approach to community building that has been articulated by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). Their original research involved learning from over 3,000 communities in the US about what members of those communities had done to improve or develop things in their own neighbourhoods. From this they identified six key community building blocks: the skills of local residents; the power of local associations; the resources of public, private and non-profit institutions; the physical resources and ecology of local places; the economic resources of local places; the stories and heritage of local places. These building blocks are the community assets as reflected in the local people's real-world experience of helping their neighbourhoods to flourish.

ABCD is a model of capacity focussed development where local people are enabled to recognize and use their community's assets – individuals, associations and institutions – and

start from them so solve their own problems. The model is asset-based because its first principle is to start with what is present in the community. It is therefore, by necessity, internally focussed so that it concentrates on the concerns and capacities of the local people who retain control of the process. The whole process is relationship driven, so a key task of the approach is to work on the connections between and among local residents, associations and institutions and maintain those relationships. This approach might be contrasted with a traditional needs-based path of community development which first identifies the needs of a local community or neighbourhood in order to determine how these problems might be solved. The solutions to these problems often involved bringing in outside expertise, and funding externally led programmes. The unintended negative consequences of the needs-based approach is disempowerment of the local residents who have not defined the problem or solution for themselves and have been turned into recipients of help, clients of the service that is now being provided for them. Walter (1985) identifies the distorting influence of social actions being oriented towards meeting needs: in our public discourse the language of needs seems to have a moral imperative which subtly overrides other values such as choice, which might be thought to be more powerful in a democratic and consumer culture.

One caveat in relation to ABCD is to be clear that it does not imply that lower income communities do not need additional resources or funding from outside. Rather, that those external resources will be most effectively used if the local community is itself invested in the process and has defined the purpose for which the resources have been obtained. A community's assets are absolutely necessary but usually not sufficient to meet the developmental challenges that it faces. A second caveat is that ABCD should not substitute

for existing forms of community organisation or neighbourhood planning, rather it is intended to complement them.

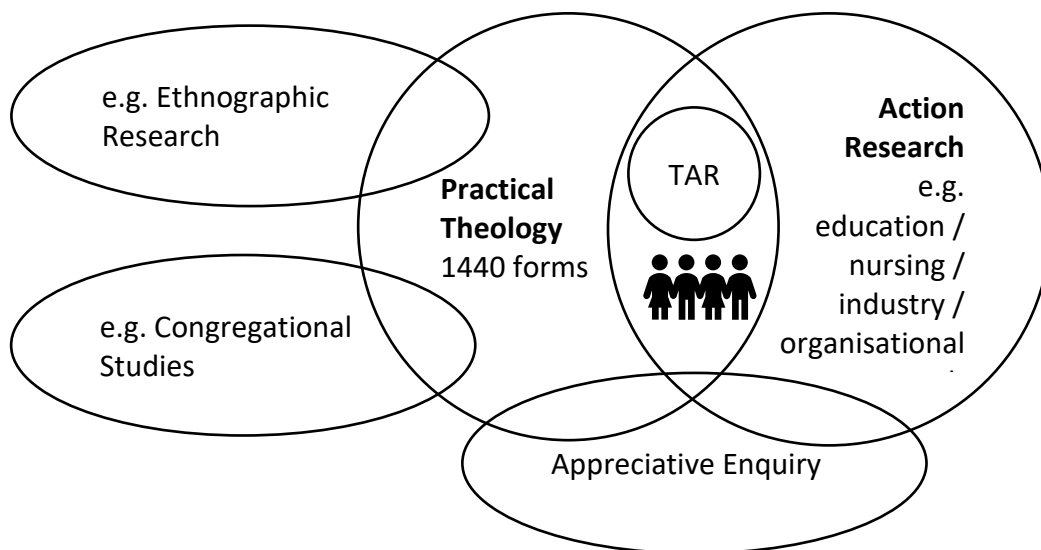
The ABCD process involves first mapping the assets of the community, which in itself can be a profound and empowering experience as people see that there is an abundance in their community (McKnight and Block, 2010). The second step is to connect and mobilize these assets for the good of the community; this is made possible by people creating or forming associations. Through this process people move from being consumers or clients to being citizens capable of exercising their agency for the good of their community and neighbours.


Amongst few published critiques of ABCD, MacLeod and Emejulu (2014) argue that it accommodates to rather than counters neoliberalism. ABCD was developed in the US in the 1980s against the backdrop of reducing expenditure on social welfare and the emerging neoliberalism of the Reagan Administration. Rather than promoting grassroots democracy they see in ABCD a rejection of statist solutions and a giving in to the individualisation and privatisation of public life; the language of 'assets' rather than 'solidarity' is not accidental. Responsibility for social problems, injustice and inequality is shifted from the state to individuals and local communities. In response Russell (2016) argues that it is a false assertion that 'ABCD is pro-marketisation and individualisation'. A key principle of ABCD (as noted above) is that the skills of individuals have to be brought into relationship for their power to be realised, therefore ABCD cannot be said to be pro-individualisation. ABCD is, if anything, anti-consumerist and anti-market, seeing those forces as disabling of citizenship (McKnight and Block, 2010). Rather ABCD is in favour of associational and collective life and

the support of powerful and productive communities. Where the critique is valid is when the terminology of asset-based approaches is misappropriated to justify the withdrawal of resources such as state support from individuals and communities.

The Relationship between Practical Theology and Action Research

PT and AR both have distinctive values, methods and traditions which make them appropriate ways of engaging with the issue of developing work with older people in a parish church and local community context. This research project is both PT and AR. The project involved working at the point where these two approaches overlap together whilst still maintaining their distinctiveness; doing PT through AR or possibly doing AR in a PT kind of way. There are many ways of doing PT which are not AR and not all AR is PT, so they can be mutually exclusive. There would also be ways of responding to this scenario which are neither PT nor AR but some other kind of implicit or explicit process of problem solving or strategic planning. These permutations might be represented diagrammatically thus:



 = this PAR project

Theological Action Research

A model of Theological Action Research (TAR) has been proposed by Cameron *et al.* (2010) which builds in an examination of the theological dimension of each step of the AR cycle. In contrast to the experience-reflection-action cycle of Practical Theological Reflection (PTR) which brings in theology as one of the tools of reflection, the strength of TAR is that it sees theology as present in every step – it is ‘theological all the way through’ (Cameron *et al.*, 2010, p. 51). The other characteristics of TAR as claimed by the authors are that it recognizes theology in ‘four voices’, namely, formal, operant, espoused and normative; that it has a conversational method through which theology is disclosed; that it is a formative transformation of practice; and that it allows practice to contribute to theology (pp. 53-60). What is then proposed is a consultation process between insider and outsider teams who are reflecting on the issue in hand with the conversation being facilitated by the outsider team. The TAR process is that a set-up questionnaire provides the information about the setting, a research question is identified, research is designed to attempt to answer the question, data is gathered and reflected upon and an action plan agreed (pp. 85-90). The insider team have the knowledge of the organisation in which the research is being done and the outsider team bring a greater expertise in research and theology as well as the different perspective such as any external consultant can bring to a process of organisational change. The joint reflections of the insider and outsider teams lead to renewed practice and espoused theology. A second cycle can be considered.

The main critique of TAR is that it misses the point of AR’s distinctive epistemology, which is that understanding of the problem only comes from trying to change it. In AR

reflection follows the planned action. In TAR the action plan comes at the end of what is effectively an extended reconnaissance phase, as if the action plan were the end product. The examples of TAR described in the work of Cameron *et al.* (2010) emphasise the learning and theological reflection that took place. There is less description of the engagement and new action that came from that learning or indeed that generated it.

A second critique of TAR as it is reported by Cameron *et al.* is that it is based entirely on the consultant model of AR with insider and outsider teams. This tends to diminish the sense of the insider practitioners being participants which, in turn, all too easily shifts into a disempowering experience of outsiders bringing in the resource and the expertise.

A third critique is that what is proposed as a new model can really be accommodated within existing models of AR. In the work of Coghlan and Brannick (2010), to the basic cycle is added a second parallel cycle which they term 'meta learning'; this is the level of 'learning about learning' which engages with content, process and premise (pp. 13-15). Reflection on the content is about what the researcher thinks is happening, reflection on the process is about how the research is being done, premise reflection is enquiry into the unstated underlying assumptions and perspectives including the culture of the context in which the research is being enacted. This would seem to cover much of what Cameron *et al.* include as the theological dimension of their process.

Practical Theology as Action Research

'Practical Theology as Action Research' is the title of the conclusion of Swinton and Mowat's book *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2016, pp. 260-266) which is, in turn, a key text in Graham's recent article which asks 'Is Practical Theology a form of 'Action Research'?' (Graham, 2013). This is a broader question than that of assessing whether AR is an appropriate strategy to deploy in a church context (as in Martin (2001) and in this present study). It is worth addressing here in terms of locating this project within the field of PT and as a way of getting greater clarity of definition. Given the diversity of contemporary PT (Ganzevoort, 2009; Miller-McLemore, 2014), and contrary to Graham, it cannot be argued that all varieties of PT be seen as forms of AR. However, with Swinton and Mowat, it may be said that action orientated PT can be done as AR.

The first part of Swinton and Mowat's claim for PT as AR is that PT as well as being a 'reflective discipline' is 'above all else a *theology of action*' (2016, p. 261, italics original). They quickly clarify their assertion that whilst PT is 'fundamentally *action* research', it is a 'quite specific form of action research with a particular understanding of the nature and purpose of action' (p. 261, italics original). They chart the characteristics of AR in the social sciences and recognize the connections particularly between AR and PTR. However, they go on to identify two main differences. First, social scientific AR is focussed on solving problems; it is a process for generating solutions. In contrast, PT has a wider purpose of seeking to challenge practice in order to move it to greater faithfulness. This is much more than problem solving, indeed in this mode Swinton and Mowat claim that PT 'understood as a theology of action, through the process of complexification and cultural challenge, often

ends up *creating* more and previously unrecognized ‘problems’ (p. 262, italics original). The aim of PT is more faithful, not more effective, practice.

The second difference that Swinton and Mowat identify is that the understanding of action in PT is different from that assumed in AR. Drawing on Heitink they assert a teleological aspect to action in PT in that there is an end that ‘transcends all particular forms of action’ (2016, p. 263). Action for the practical theologian goes beyond the ‘merely pragmatic’, though does not exclude it, and has the purpose of enabling the faithfulness of communities and individuals and their participation in God’s action in the world. According to Swinton and Mowat (2016, p. 263), for PT action should seek to ‘mediate between the practices of the Christian faith and the practices of the world’; action serves the greater purpose of the mediation of the gospel and is not action for its own sake. The way in which AR, and indeed all social scientific qualitative methods, are used in the service of PT is named by Swinton and Mowat as their ‘conversion’ (2016, p. 264). It is a kind of reverse secularisation where the tools (as it were property) of the secular world are put to work by the church (or at least the theology faculty) in the service of its purposes: the fostering of faithful practice.

In her recent article, Graham (2013) identifies a further difference in that Swinton and Mowat are still theologically located in a Barthian position of asserting the revelatory character of theology. They remain unconvinced that practice can reshape faith, neither do they seem to go so far as saying that experience, reflection and action can be a source for theology. For them PT ‘takes human experience seriously’, but ‘that does not imply that experience is a source of revelation’ (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, p. 6). To me this seems to

be a fundamental epistemological difference between this account of PT and AR, as I understand it, since in AR action is a source of new knowledge and insight especially into embodied forms of knowing.

For Swinton and Mowat, then, PT can be understood as AR as long as it goes beyond AR's focus on the immediate pragmatic concern with effectiveness and problem solving to bring critical faithfulness into the situation being addressed. PT can be seen as AR as long as the understandings generated in the research of action enable more faithful practice and are not seen as reshaping the revealed faith.

Graham does not answer her own question about whether PT is a form of AR, but concludes that TAR is like AR in that it shares the objectives of understanding a given situation and changing it through new praxis. She also claims that they share the objective of value based character formation. The shared values are that research is never dispassionate or neutral, and that the actions lead to emancipatory transformations of situations, organisations and people. Rather than affirming that PT is a form of AR, Graham sees AR as a tool that practical theologians might wish to add to their repertoire (2013, p. 150). She also sees the potential of practical theologians 'working within an action research paradigm' (p. 177), and recognizes that 'practical theologians may find common cause with the struggles of action researchers' (p. 178). However, TAR is unlike AR in that 'practical theologians are not simply concerned with change management or the techniques of activism, but with schooling people in the well-springs of tradition from which practical wisdom flows' (p. 178).

Summary Conclusion

This project connects with Graham's position that AR is a useful tool that practical theologians might wish to draw upon amongst other methods and strategies. Rather than seeing PT as a form of AR, this project models a way of doing PT through AR. Despite Swinton and Mowat's qualifications, this project shows that AR is an appropriate model for practical theological engagement and research. Although this research project employs a straight-forward AR strategy, it is PT because it arises from the practical concerns of members of the local ecclesial community, motivated by Christian faith, with the intention of serving the well-being of our neighbours, and through prayerful and theological reflection generating new insights into God's providence and saving action in the world.

With respect to the discussion about post-modern developments of AR and the proposed model of TAR, I want to reassert the grounded nature and basis of AR which is meant to be a pragmatic way to attempt to find practical solutions to problems. It is 'systematic enquiry by practitioners about their own practices' (Zeichner, 1993, p. 200), but it is done with the view to 'improving the quality of action within' their social situation (Elliot, 1991, p. 69). PAR is an apt approach to this project because of the ethos of conducting the research with older people in the community. The PAR process empowered a group of older people to contribute to every stage of the research process including the project's steering group and the subsequent design and implementation of the main research action. The participants and the people who hosted and led the course also contributed to the data analysis and evaluation of the project.

CHAPTER 4.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY⁷

Introduction

As noted in the introductory chapter, the origins of this research project were in 2008 when the question of developing work with older people was first raised at a parish conference. Initially the issue was framed as, “We are not doing enough for older people”; this statement met with general assent. In reflecting back, I asked “If we are not doing enough for older people, what is the more that we need to do?” Whilst there were some responses there were none that met with any consensus. So the initial research question arose out of this strategic planning discussion and the discernment of a perceived need: how can we develop our work with older people in our church and community?

Whilst reflecting with a friend on the possible ways this question could be explored, they recommended undertaking a DPT with this research question as the focus. Following a conversation with the course director I enrolled on the DPT as a way of bringing structure, resources, support and accountability to the project. It also presented me with an opportunity for some continuing ministerial development. The initial idea was to employ an AR strategy but I also kept an open mind and gave time to test whether that was the most appropriate strategy to adopt.

⁷ The primary source material for this chapter was the research journal and annual progress reports.

Reconnaissance Stage – developing understanding of issue and suggesting ideas from theory

In the first year of the DPT programme (beginning Autumn 2009) I carried out a review of the literature on ageing and the church which coincided with Sabbatical leave allowing for an in-depth study. At this stage I particularly engaged with the work of James Woodward as one of the leading British practical theologians addressing this theme. Indeed, it was hearing a presentation from Woodward at our local Deanery Synod that helped inspire some members of the church to be involved with the research.

In an attempt to develop some of the ideas explored in the literature review, in year two of the DPT I sought to teach *Lectio Divina*, a traditional meditative way of praying with the Bible, to a mixed group of older adults and young people. This was intended as a pilot study for research into intergenerational prayer, exploring theories of gerotranscendence (Tornstam 1989, 1992, 1993; Jewell, 2010) as well as the contribution that the elders in the church community can play in supporting younger generations. Had it gone well I might have developed that project as the main area of research for Part 2 of the doctoral programme. However, the ethical considerations were complicated with regard to working with under 16s and potentially vulnerable adults; this led to delays in obtaining ethical review for this project which meant I could not pursue that action at that stage of the course. Instead for that module I wrote an article on *Lectio Divina* as a mode of Practical Theological Reflection (PTR). We did run the prayer groups at a later stage but without writing up for publication. In a way it functioned within the congregation as an initial action that raised interest and awareness of the overall research project.

First Action Steps

In year three of the programme I developed a research proposal and wrote a reflection on practice, which should have led smoothly into the fourth year and the beginning of the research process. However, the ethical review process once again was beset by delays and I spent most of that year working through it. I reflect further on this below as a sticking point which was both deeply frustrating and a point of reflective learning. As well as eventually completing the ethical review process I also established the steering group which constitutes an important part of the AR process. The role of this group is to provide a space for reflection and support, and to share and develop ideas; they also provided challenge and constructive criticism. It consisted of four people: two members of St Francis Church who both have an interest and commitment to working with older people; two other people who are engaged with community development and support work.

In year five, 2013, the first action step was to run four focus groups followed by a plenary session. This is described in more detail in the following chapter. The focus was on identifying the needs of older people in the community.

It was at this stage that I became interested in ABCD as an approach that I felt might enable the development of an appropriate and sustainable response to the identified needs. Following a period of reflection on the findings of the focus groups one of the follow up actions was to carry out a congregational survey to better understand needs and resources. In May 2014, 55 people were interviewed by 6 members of the congregation who had been trained by a member of the steering group. The interview was conducted by completing a questionnaire adapted from the 'know your neighbourhood' course run by the Community

Regeneration Team of the diocese of Birmingham. The intention was to identify the assets within the congregation and connect people together with similar interests. Then, where a need had been identified, to build relationships across the church and wider community.

One illustration of where this worked was with a 90-year-old woman, living in a nursing home, who in the past had been very involved in amateur dramatics and still had a great love of theatre. She was introduced to another member of the church who directs a local drama group. The group had a meeting at the nursing home with the older woman and read through a play together.

My reflection on this approach was that whilst it had lots of potential it did not develop as we had hoped. We realised that it required significant levels of co-ordination and we did not successfully recruit the necessary people to be 'connectors'. This action is not reported further here but could have been a fruitful area to develop.

The other follow up action was the Ageing Well course which became the key action in this research project and is presented in Part 2 of this dissertation.

Learning through the Overall Research Process

Reflection on the Ethical Review Process: problematizing pastoral practice and exploring power dynamics

A key moment of learning, for me as a researching professional, arose through area of research ethics and subsequent reflection on the appropriate exercise of power in this

situation. Ethical review is an essential part of the research process. Having learnt in Year 2 of the DPT programme how rigorous the ethical review process can be, the clear intention was to convert the research proposal written in Year 3 into a submission to the ethical review panel at the beginning of the Year 4. However, this was more complicated and challenging than I first realised. The application for ethical review was submitted at the end of January 2013. At the beginning of March a response was received from the panel requiring certain changes, but then I did not manage to resubmit a final fully revised application until June. Permission to proceed was received one week later.

I have two main reflections on this. First, that there was (at least for me) a natural slump in the transition from Part 1 to Part 2 which, perhaps, had to be accepted as part of the dynamics of the course. This may have been overcome had I managed to submit the ethical review papers in July 2012, but that was not achievable with the workload of submitting the two Year 3 pieces. It also revealed and reflected the challenge of part-time doctoral study – in year two of the programme I had many work commitments as well as personal demands on my time and attention; most of the fourth year of the programme I spent working through ethical review. The academic programme (and other constraints such as the conditions of grant aid funding) impose timeframes on projects of this kind. These are necessary but do not sit neatly with the messy reality of research carried out by practitioners on a part-time basis in the midst of other professional commitments and in a context of pastoral relationships. One of the skills acquired in the process of the research has been to negotiate these tensions and adapt the work accordingly to complete things within these constraints.

My second reflection is that what was being asked of me in the ethical review process was a deep challenge to my usual professional practice. This called into question the way I work on a daily basis and was so personally challenging that I resisted engaging with it. In my professional (pastoral) practice as a parish priest my working assumption is an ethic of trust; in almost every pastoral encounter, people trust me with deeply personal and sensitive information about themselves and their lives. I endeavour to handle this information respectfully, holding it in confidence as appropriate, and the whole exchange is carried out with due care with issues of consent kept implicit.

In contrast, research ethics operates on a hermeneutic of suspicion. The presumption is that the researcher may cause harm, is not committed to the best interests of the participants, that there is no pre-existing or continuing relationship between researcher and other people involved, and that consent is required at each stage. This is what I found hard.

What I have come to see is that there is a wisdom born of years of research experience to which it is worth attending. In particular, the need to be alert to the power dynamics in pastoral relationships and how they might have a distorting effect on the research. This issue is especially relevant in practitioner research which, by definition, is carried out in the practitioner's own context. The involvement of my steering group was most helpful in working around the issue of inviting members of the church community to be participants in the research project.

The attention paid to power and clerical identity often focusses on the problematic issues such as abuse of power or situations of conflict. The parish priest does have some level of authority even if that is often mostly symbolic and often ambivalent (Carr, 1985, pp.

61-65). The ambivalence about power for many clergy (myself included) is reflected in the models of ministry such as servant-leader that are frequently employed. In local churches pastoral power is not usually exercised in 'executive', 'rationalized' or 'monarchical' forms of authority but rather in more 'distributive' or 'facilitative' and 'dispositional' forms (M. Percy, 2006b, pp. 114-116). In relation to the ethical issues in this research project it was most important to be alert to the dispositional power dynamics whereby the expectations and habits of members of the church in relation to my role might have confused issues around consent to participate in the project or then later distorted the results as participants sought to give what they perceived to be the right answer. However, in relation to the implementation of the project it was essential that I owned and exercised my power appropriately to enable the participation of members of the church and community, to enact decisions taken collectively, and to facilitate the deployment of the resources and assets present in the community. It is necessary to hold together love and power; this is possible when power is directed towards seeking the welfare of others, and when power is exercised in the attempt to bring about something that is in the others' interests (Kahane, 2010).

Part 2

THE AGEING WELL COURSE:

KEY ACTION AND RESULTS

CHAPTER 5.

THE AGEING WELL COURSE: DESIGN, OVERVIEW AND EVALUATION

Introduction

Within the overall research process the Ageing Well Course represents the key action of the second AR spiral. This chapter describes the design process, gives an overview of the course and presents an initial evaluation. A detailed, week-by-week account of the course is given in Appendix 6. In addition, a key critical incident in the running of the course is described and a reflection on the course as an action is offered.

Preliminary Observations about the Research Design

There are two aspects of the research design that it is important to be clear about at this point: the research team; and the use of an external facilitator. To repeat part of a definition from the methodology chapter (p. 55 above): Participative Action Research is ‘a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations... the approach is only action research when it is *collaborative...*’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 5 – italics original). An intentional part of the research design for this project was to recruit a team of people over 55 to lead the Ageing Well course and in doing so to be participants in the research. In terms of the AR process, they were the people who, with me, would be carrying out the action, making observations and reflecting on what we had

experienced. So, although the Ageing Well course had people who were participants and who gave their feedback on the course material, the primary source of data was the recorded reflective learning of the team of leaders/hosts with myself and the facilitator.

The role of the external facilitator was to bring expertise in designing the course in terms of process and content and to help equip the hosts for the task of facilitating the course. The 'outside' perspective he brought to the reflections and from his report enriched the data. The actual research process was not delegated to the external facilitator but he collaborated with the local team to enable them to do the research. The way in which the team of older members of the community led the course and reflected together was a key factor in making the research more ethical and more rigorous. This approach reduced the risk of making older people the objects of my research: rather they were participants and co-researchers. The rigor of the research was improved by the principal action being carried out by the research team which minimized the potentially distorting effects of my involvement and presence.

Demographics

The participants in the various stages of the research were drawn from the members of St Francis Church and the wider Bournville community. In addition, there was a steering group for the project which consisted of two members of the church and two people bringing relevant expertise who were not local residents, but who had connections either with the Birmingham Diocese or the Bournville Village Trust. Demographic information was

gathered through participants completing an information form along with their consent form when they responded to the invitation to take part in the focus groups, or at the beginning of the Ageing Well course (see p.246). Demographic data on the Bournville Parish was taken from the 2011 census, correlated to the parish by postcode.⁸

There were 22 participants in the initial four focus groups: 15 of whom were female (68%) and 7 male (32%). Their ages were: 1 x 55+, 16 x 66-80, and 5 x 80+ (the eldest participant was 90). Marital status was mixed with: 5 single, 5 married, 8 widow/widower, 4 divorced. Ethnicity of the groups was less mixed with 21 participants being White British and 1 Black British. All were retired except 1 who still did some part-time teaching work. The groups' gender mix is representative of the wider congregation in this age range and the lack of ethnic diversity corresponds to the parish context and therefore church membership (91% White British, 1 % Black British of Caribbean descent, in the 2011 census). Data is not available to correlate the marital status of the group members with that of the wider congregation or parish in relation to different age ranges.

The steering group consisted of: one woman aged 40-55; two women aged 55-65; and one man aged 65+, all of whom were White British. Two were working in related fields of community development and two were recently retired members of church with an interest work with older people.

In relation to the Ageing Well course, the host team was made up of three women and two men, all of whom were 65+ and White British. The participants in the course changed

⁸ Available online via Parish Spotlights:
http://cofebirmingham.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/MOSELEY_520062_Bournville_hnCfPeu.pdf

slightly week by week but with a core group of people in attendance. The participants were comprised of 12 women (75%) and 4 men (25%); age ranges were 1 x 55-65, 12 x 66-80, and 3 x 80+; all of whom were White British. This is broadly typical of the church membership and wider parish population (21% of whom are aged 65+, in 2011 census), though men were slightly underrepresented in the course participants.

Focus Group Process and Findings

The first cycle of the AR process involved a series of focus groups which took place in Autumn 2013. The aim of these groups was to begin to identify the needs of older people in Bournville. The first question the groups responded to was simply “What are the needs of older people in Bournville?” The results were collated and presented at a plenary meeting at which the results were discussed and priority issues identified (the full list of collated findings is presented in Appendix 3). The priority issues were: the need to make a contribution and have a role; preventing isolation and loneliness; and, related to the second, promoting belonging and company. An initial conversation then took place to explore possible ways in which these ideas might be followed up with practical actions.

However, this was not the whole story. The focus groups also explored a second question which asked: “If we were running course called a beginner’s guide for older people, what would you want us to include in it?” This was intended as a heuristic device to elicit information about peoples’ needs but approached from a different perspective. The response generated a different list of needs but, most interestingly, the discussion was more

animated and positive in tone. In many ways that shift of energy was a key moment in the overall research journey and the impression made by that change in tone and energy shaped the next stage of the research. In relation to the AR process, this led to a revising of the aim and the beginning of a second cycle in the spiral.

A few months later, some people who had participated in the focus groups started asking, "So when are you going to run that course then?" This indicated that something had been discovered indirectly which might be worthwhile exploring further. Following on from the focus group meetings of Autumn 2013, and encouraged by the steering group, in Spring 2014, I contacted an external facilitator to begin the process of designing a course which might be described as a beginner's guide to being an older person.

Key Action: Ageing Well Project

In this AR process the key action was 'Ageing Well'; a project designed to respond to the perceived needs of older people in Bournville. The aim of the project was to support a group of older people to develop courses for those entering old age. My view was that the church community had the capacity to run such a course for itself, given some additional support and guidance. The project was designed around the process of facilitating a group of older people to develop and lead the course for themselves. As well as creating a course that informs and develops skills for people entering the third age, if it were led by local older people it could also:

- build stronger networks and community for all members of the course;
- model a positive role for older people;
- help older people leading the course to develop their own skills;
- continue after the research period as a community network or social group;
- help older people leading the course think about a role as community connectors / leaders;
- provide a collective voice for older people to promote their hopes and ability to contribute.

It also seemed beneficial to devise a method of facilitating the process that could be shared with other localities. To this end documenting the research process had a significant part to play not only in evaluating the project but in making the project repeatable. The project took a strengths-based approach and, as an experienced trainer, the role of the facilitator was to:

- Set values of the co-ordinating group;
- Coach members in an inclusive approach;
- Facilitate planning sessions;
- Train the trainers;
- Provide models for adult education, group dynamics, training environment management etc.;
- Coach course leaders in developing the course.

This project sought to link up the need and the asset by empowering people to take an active role in 'being old' positively. It aimed for a culture change in the way older people are engaged in our particular community, and hopefully, beyond that.

The idea for this project arose from the first AR cycle in exploring ways to develop work with older people in the church and community. Focus group work with 24 local residents and a further survey with 55 members of the congregation helped to identify the need to prevent isolation and loneliness through building up participation in social and

community groups. Other evidence for the need for the project came from a resident census carried out by Bournville Village Trust (BVT) in 2009. The results of this survey showed a significant appetite to engage in activities for older people over and above what is presently available in the community. The project was designed to equip people at three levels:

1. To equip 4-6 course leaders to:

- Learn new skills or apply existing skills in a new setting;
- Shape a community response to the increasing number of older people;
- Learn how to be positive and inclusive;
- Build and lead networks in the community;
- Work together as a team.

2. To equip 16-20 course participants to:

- learn what is available to support them as they grow old;
- help them think 'intentionally' about ageing and where and how they might want to age;
- be positive about ageing and think about how they contribute to their community;
- build new social networks in their own community that can also become caring networks.

3. Especially if repeated in this local area, it will:

- Change local culture towards ageing;
- Build a wide network of active older people;
- Enable older people to share concerns and interests, and organise themselves to arrange activities that suit them.

The final say over course content was to be decided by the co-ordinating team, but with reference to the earlier research which suggested that the course should include: making good appropriate use of health services; getting the most from your GP; maintaining health and independence; keeping physically active; maintaining relationships. We also considered developing course materials that encourage people to make use of modern technology; accepting ageing; contributing to society. The facilitator's role was to assist the group leaders in finding a simple structure to make the course flexible but repeatable.

From Vision to Action

Discussions at meetings of the steering group led to a member of the group and me submitting a grant application to *Awards for All* for funds to run the course, including paying a facilitator to work with the leaders and to help run the sessions, room hire, refreshments and printing costs for publicity and course materials. This bid was submitted at the end of June 2014. At that stage the advice from *Awards for All* was to allow 4-5 months from submitting the application before the proposed start date for the project, although initial guidance on the application form states 3 months after submission. At first our proposed start date was 1st September 2014. The letter confirming the grant was dated 27th October 2014, with funds released to us on 7th November but an embargo on publicising the grant until 3rd December. All of this set back the start date for running the course. Until then I had

been hoping to run the course in the Autumn with a repeat run in the Spring but that was not practical.

A further delay came when we received the grant conditions and realised that if a third party was being used (such as our external facilitator) then their appointment had to be through a competitive tender process. This was difficult since we knew of no other person who had the local skills and knowledge to facilitate this work, nor how else we could invite tenders. Fortunately, a solution was found in using the Community Regeneration department of the Church of England in Birmingham as a broker. They provided the necessary quality assurance to the grant making trust that the person we wanted to use was not only the best suited but also represented best value for the use of public money (email correspondence 24 November 2014).

Preparation and Recruitment of Leaders/Hosts

In November 2014, within the church and community centre, and then publicly after the official launch in December, I began recruiting leaders for the course and six people expressed an interest (an example of the posters used is included in Appendix 4). One of those was not available on Thursdays when we planned to run the group and so could not, in the end, be involved. We decided to refer to ourselves as hosts (although occasionally we did use the term leaders) to avoid an identity as trainers and to emphasise a role of welcoming and ensuring accessibility.

Four of the five met the facilitator and myself for the first time as a group on 19 February 2015. At that meeting we reviewed the background the course and set out the aim of running a course comprised of 8 sessions (4 before Easter and 4 after). The course would bring together people over 55 to explore the life journey ahead of them and to help them to do the things they want to do from that point onwards. In the process of doing that we would attempt to answer some of the participants' questions that people brought up in the focus groups. The structure came from the initial research and the aim was to create a space for sharing wisdom, learning from one another's experience and receiving more specialist information from external speakers.

The focus groups had generated a list of about 50 separate items which, for the feedback to the four focus groups (on 17 October 2013), were collated to twenty.

A Beginners Guide to Older Age

1. Careers – work: next 20 years – volunteering. After work... what to do? Loss of role and status; 'Calling' in older age – how to use your gifts and skills
2. Death and Dying – talking with our families – planning our own funeral; Preparing for the end of life – making a will, de-cluttering, planning a funeral (very delicate, who with?); Facing loss
3. How to do something new: Discovering 'spaciousness' in older age – keeping a wider vision – negatives into positives
4. Social and Health services – how to get the help you need; Keeping well – getting the most from your GP; Maintaining your health and independence
5. Keeping mentally active
6. Keeping physically active – finding a rhythm for day/week/life
7. Keeping balance – energy / activity / limitations
8. Facing fears and feeling safe

9. Finding information and guidance (and Spiritual direction)
10. Gender issues: ageing is different for men and women
11. Question time
12. Accepting ageing: Learn to love yourself
13. Independence and reassurance using modern technology
 - a. Computer
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Ordering from Amazon and Sainsbury's
 - d. Telephone and text
14. Preparing for greater dependency – without wanting to ask others to do it for you
15. Money management / finances
16. How to keep going out
17. How to flourish - Enjoyment (rewards other than money)
18. Keeping some form of work or helping others. Older people can offer time and skills – need to share
19. Keeping relationships in repair – family and friends, befriending. Relationships with neighbours etc. Pets
20. Avoiding isolation (or How to join a coffee morning)

Through discussion the topics that might be most achievable were identified. It was recognized that what would suit one person would not work for everyone. The group process was designed to build up confidence in the earlier sessions to enable participants to have trust in each other as more difficult topics were addressed.

From the list of twenty the first plan for the eight sessions comprised (number in brackets refer to the initial list):

Keeping physically and mentally active (5,6,7)

New steps and challenges (1,3,18)

Death and dying (2) – we had already had an offer of help with this session from a retired clergy person in the church

New and existing relationships / good relationships – avoiding isolation (19, 20)

Health: getting the most from your GP (4) – again we had an expression of interest from a local GP to give some input into this session.

Keeping safe, feeling safe (8)

Money matters and benefits (15)

The plans also included an evaluation and celebration event at the end of the course.

The design of the group process also included about 10 minutes at the beginning of each session intended to contribute to accepting ageing or countering negative attitudes towards ageing. This could be in the form of funny stories or video clips, etc. Offers of help had been received in contributing to the course on the topics of death and dying and bereavement. In addition, there was an offer from a local GP about getting the most from your local health service. In deciding that finance was an important topic we decided to try to find someone who might have specialist knowledge around pension, benefits and tax related issues. The partner of one of the hosts works as a solicitor with expertise in wills and powers of attorney and he offered to approach her to contribute to the legal issues session.

The second planning session was held the following week 26.2.15. At this we planned the logistics of refreshment and room layout, participants and further publicity, offer of travel expenses, the ground rules for the group and introductory exercises. We discussed accessibility, name badges, practicalities of showing film clips, evaluation, and our roles as enablers and animators. The sequence of the sessions was rearranged due to availability of

external speakers, in particular the GP who could only make the very last date of the course.

The final listing of sessions with dates run was:

- 5/3 New steps and challenges
- 12/3 Keeping mentally and physically active
- 19/3 New and existing relationships
- 26/3 Feeling safe, keeping safe
- 16/4 Money Matters
- 23/4 Death and Dying
- 30/4 Legal issues
- 7/5 Your health and the health services

Due to the availability of the external speakers the sequence of sessions was such that the first half were all group exercise and discussion based, and the second half had input from a guest speaker as well as small group and plenary discussion.

The course ran at the local community centre on a midweek morning from 10.30 a.m. to 12noon and was attended by 12-14 people each week. The sessions had a positive tone, people were willing to be open and honest in sharing with each other and there was a good level of discussion.

A Critical Incident

Session 2 of the course was about keeping mentally and physically active. As a starting point for discussion the group watched a short film by NHS Choices about 'Staying Active

Over 60'.⁹ Watching the film prompted one of the more interesting and disruptive moments of the course. When people were invited to share their reactions and responses to the film there was lots of talking. A critical moment for this session came when someone asked in a very negative tone "What's the point?" This prompted a lot of reflection and learning, later, on the part of the hosts. There was a very good and serious point being made by the participant who had experienced the message of the film as being a selfish one: it being all about keeping me going for my own sake. They were the only person to pick up on this. The difficult aspect was that this criticism of the film was communicated with a very strong negative emotional force behind it, which the group hosts found very deflating. We were left with questions around whether keeping mentally and physically active is appropriate self-care, to what extent should our activity be directed towards others rather than ourselves, and can we see ourselves as intrinsically valuable even when our activity is not geared to producing anything useful.

A Reflection on Theoretical Space

In my journal, I noted down a question:

Is our Ageing Well programme a course? A space for shared learning and reflection. Creation of a 'theoretical space' where ideas are being generated. (Journal entry 24 April 2015)

⁹ 'Staying active over 60' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1Uoce6hfyc>

This entry was made whilst on a DPT Day School after a discussion around the idea of space. It was a moment when I first felt for myself the seriousness of the question as to whether this really is a course. In a supervision meeting (on 22 January 2015) the premise of having a course to learn about being older was challenged. Part of my response was that there are all kinds of courses for learning different things: dance, cookery, childbirth, parenting skills, introduction to Christian faith, marriage preparation, and languages. So why not ageing?

On an evaluation sheet from one of the first weeks of the course one participant commented by asking “what is the difference between this and a pre-retirement course?” At the beginning of a subsequent session we responded to this question as a way of restating our aims and purpose. A pre-retirement course is for a group of people at the transition from work into retirement; this is for a broader range of ages from 55 upwards. The main difference is that the hosts and facilitator are not experts telling the participants what to do. The idea is for participants to share their practical wisdom. The experience of ageing is broader than pre-retirement issues even though there can be some overlap, for example when we looked at financial issues.

These questions and competing ideas and conceptions of what a course is or is not reflect different ideas of knowledge and how we learn. As a team hosting and leading the course we were committed to creating a safe space for people to share their experiences, hear about different ideas and learn from one another about what helps them to age well. For me it was not primarily about the content or even the process, though both matter. What I was interested in was the impact it had on us and the insights it gave us into the needs and strengths of older people in this community and how best to respond to them.

This course was a key action in this action research project. The design and testing and improvement of the course as process and content is, I believe, a worthwhile end in itself and it is one output of the research with potential impact for work with older people in other churches and community centres. What I hoped all along would be just as worthwhile and interesting is what we learned through this action about ourselves and about ageing and the church community.

Data Gathering and Analysis

In terms of the overall PAR process the Ageing Well Course represented the key action. It was therefore important to analyse the course in as deep and broad a way as practical. There are six data streams feeding into the analysis and interpretation of the course





1. Week by week evaluation sheets from participants
2. End of course evaluation from participants
3. Week by week reflections on learning from leaders.
4. Transcript of leaders' discussion after each meeting
5. Report from external facilitator
6. My own reflections.

The last section of this chapter draws on 1-2, the next chapter presents results from 3-4; and the following chapter draws on 5-6 to interpret the findings.

Evaluation of the Ageing Well Course

1. Week by week evaluation from participants

Each week participants were invited to fill in a quick evaluation which involved circling a face showing a range of feelings from very happy, smiling, unsure, or sad. Participants were asked to give feedback in this way on the topic covered, how the group was led, guest speakers, the venue, and whether they would recommend the day's session to someone else. There was also a space for other comments at the bottom of the page. The feedback sheets for all the sessions were then collated and numbers in each column totalled (table below). The overall impression is very positive.

					Total
The topic covered:	74	22	4	1	101
How the group was led:	81	17	2	1	101
Guest speakers (if any):	42	4		1	47
The venue – comfort, sound etc.:	60	34	5	1	100
Would you recommend today's session to someone else?	77	16	6	1	100
Totals	334	93	17	5	449
Percentages	74%	21%	4%	1%	100%

Combining the very happy and happy ratings gives a positive response of 95%.

The least satisfactory aspect of the course was the venue which was the 'Middle Room' in the St Francis Youth and Community Centre. The main problem was that it was often too hot, especially with 20 people in. There were also issues with sound, both in terms of

external noise from other users of the Centre, and the acoustics of the room not being very good when there were four simultaneous small group discussions taking place.

There were, also, the other comments added each week to review. A brief reading of these indicated that people were very positive about the course and found it interesting. They found in it lots of food for thought, and it was described as 'excellent' and 'brilliant'. There were also some comments which were more critical: one session was described by one participant as 'deeply disturbing' and after another session one participant wondered what the difference was between this and a retirement course. These brief evaluation comments help voice the participants' experience of the course.

2. End of course evaluation

Forms were given out at the end of session 8 and all participants were invited back to a celebration event two weeks later. They were asked to bring back their evaluation forms to that meeting which gave time and opportunity to reflect on the whole course. The questions that the evaluation form asked them to reflect on are as follows:

- What is your overall impression of the course?
- What did you like most about the course?
- What was your least favourite part? Was there anything you wish we had not done?
- If we did the course again, what would you like to be included that was missing this time?
- What did you learn about ageing and ageing well?
- What is the one thing you are going to do as a result of coming on the course?
- How do you feel you have changed as a result of attending Ageing Well? (attitudes, ideas, feelings)
- Would you be interested in meeting up informally with other people who have been part of this group? If yes, please give us your contact details:

After collating the responses, the overall impressions were very positive with people finding the course excellent and very helpful. People seemed to like the mix of interaction and discussion with presentation and information. The least favourite session, amongst those who returned completed evaluation forms, was overwhelmingly “Death and Dying”. This was possibly due to the difficulty of the topic but also the way the guest speakers presented and led the session. Participants suggested a wide range of possible future sessions including nutrition, travel, housing, discrimination, IT confidence, and the spiritual dimension.

A key focus for learning was about being positive – which is a good outcome given the strengths-based ethos of the course. People reported feeling more confident and motivated to do certain things in response to the sessions. There seemed to be positive impact on the level of understanding and passing on information, as well as in helping people feel more positive about the process and experience of ageing. The eleven people who completed end of course evaluations all indicated a willingness to meet again informally.

Summary Conclusion

The overall evaluation of the course was that it all ran very well. The data gathered from the week-by-week evaluation sheets showed a positive response of 95% for participants being either happy or very happy with the course. A key focus for participants’ learning was about being positive and people reported feeling more confident and

motivated to do certain things. A positive impact of the course was an increased level of understanding about the topics discussed; the communication of information; and in helping people feel more positive about the process and experience of ageing.

As well as being a course which people participated in and enjoyed, the *action* of the course created a theoretical space for the hosts as researchers to reflect on experience and generate insights. The analysis of those reflections is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6.

RESULTS: DATA ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Introduction

This chapter and the next represent something of the observation and reflection stage in the AR cycle. An important feature of the research design for this project was that, whilst there were participants in the Ageing Well course who gave their feedback on the course and its contents, the primary source of data was the recorded reflective learning of the team of leaders/hosts with myself and the facilitator. After each session the research team met to reflect and to discuss what had been learned. The written reflections and transcripts of the recorded discussions are the data which was analysed and that material is presented in this chapter organized according to the emerging themes. In terms of the epistemology of AR, the action of the course generated responses and it is in reflecting on these that an understanding of the real situation can be developed.

Where appropriate, explanatory comment introduces each node. The iterative process of coding involved repeated readings of the transcripts, allocation of significant words, phrases or whole dialogues to the relevant nodes. Sometimes the frequency with which a theme was present pointed to its significance, at other times themes stood out as important even if there were few references. Reflexivity on my part as the researcher was a key factor in this part of the process, though it is hard to articulate precisely how reflexivity is operationalized in the research. There were several ways in which I attempted to be

reflexive: involving the hosts in the interpretation process; recording my responses to the research in my journal; reflecting with the steering group; and being transparent about my role as both vicar and researcher. Because of the qualitative design of the research this stage of data analysis rested on my response to the recorded material. My personal context and the background to the project have been described above (pp. 12-15), and this interpersonal and institutional context have, no doubt, influenced the research process. The process of reflecting on the data was one of careful and rigorous attention to the voices of the hosts and participants. It was not done just by intuition, nor is there any claim made to a positivistic objectivity. An important epistemological assumption is that that the voices recorded in some give access to the experience of the older people who are the subjects of the research. Reflexivity plays an important part in resisting the positivist pressure to place oneself outside the data or the analytical process; a further epistemological assumption of PAR is that the researcher is committed to and acting within the research context.

This chapter presents the sifted and summarised ideas. The presentation is systematic in that it follows coding themes. Subsequent chapters bring the themes together and interpret the emerging theories in relation to the wider literature. To a certain extent this is an artificial separation. It attempts to represent the different stages of the research and data analysis process, however in the process of knowledge production there is a blurred boundary between the narrative of the data and the emerging interpretation.

Data Gathering and Analysis from the Ageing Well Course Leaders

Leaders'/Hosts' Reflections

Week by week, after each session, the group leaders including myself and the facilitator completed a simple reflection sheet which asked six questions: how do I feel after today's session; what have I learnt about ageing; what have I learnt about myself; what have I learnt about others; what have I learnt about the community and the church; what have I learnt about God? These were collated each week giving a document of about 5,000 words, 8 weeks of statements under each of the six headings (enclosed as Appendix 10).

First stage analysis of these statements was done by employing de Bono's 'Thinking Hats' (2010) way of distinguishing between different kinds of thinking. All the leaders and the facilitator were involved in this process. Using the responses from the leaders and facilitator the completed statements were coded using the Qualitative Data Analysis Software *NVivo* with the different coloured thinking hats as nodes: White (facts, information and data); Red (feelings, emotion and intuition); Yellow (good points, benefits and positives); Black (risks, gravity and caution); Green (ideas, possibilities and alternatives); and Blue (overview, process, and next steps).

This is an accessible method for thinking in a focussed way avoiding what de Bono terms parallel thinking when one tries to think different ways at the same time. This was a manageable way to start my own analysis. Furthermore, and in keeping with the approach of PAR, it was a method that was easy to grasp for the members of the host team so that they were involved in interpreting the data. As a first step, each member of the team was

assigned one section of the collated data and one type of thinking to identify in the data. As a second step, they had the complete data set. I worked through the complete data set with one kind of thinking at a time. When that first filtering process was complete it was possible to separate out all the statements relating to the different kinds of thinking and learning that have been recorded. This fed into the process of identifying initial themes for coding the transcripts of the leaders' reflection meetings.

Transcripts

After each course session, including the final evaluation, the research group met over a light lunch to reflect on how it had gone that day and what had been learned. Each member of the group completed a reflection grid and these formed the basis for a discussion during which people shared their main reflections. These discussions were recorded on a digital data recorder and subsequently transcribed. The basic transcription was outsourced to a transcription service but these rough drafts required considerable revision and checking for accuracy. The merged transcriptions amount to nearly 60,000 words of discussion (an example transcription of one session is enclosed as Appendix 9). Working closely with the transcripts, general impressions formed about key themes. As the other texts were transcribed these themes became clearer and it was possible to compare them against the themes that emerged from the leaders' reflections.

Thematic Analysis of Complete Reflection Grids and Full Transcripts

Analysis of transcripts

Emerging Themes:

The research question was: how might the perceptions and needs of older people in an Anglican Parish Church be more adequately understood and addressed through an Action Research Strategy? The first theme and related sub-themes came from this research question with the aim of determining how the Ageing Well course, as a key action in this AR process, had contributed to our understanding of the needs of older people in this community and how these might be responded to. Then, by working with the first set of data and the 'Thinking Hats' coding, further themes emerged as a basis for evaluating the impact of the course. A further sub-theme was taken from the strengths or asset based approach adopted in the course allowing for insights into the strengths (and not just needs) of older people in this community.

After the initial themes had been identified and worked with for a short time node 5 was added to identify data that might feed into self-reflection on my roles as both professional and researcher. Node 6, 'Important other', was included as a catch-all and to ensure that interesting, uncategorizable statements that did not fit in with the identified themes did not get lost. Node 7 and 8, were added in during the process of coding: great quotes and God references.

List of themes arising from reflection on Ageing Well course for coding data:

1. Ageing

- 1.1. Strengths of older people
- 1.2. Needs of older people
- 1.3. Responses to needs and strengths

2. The Course (Ageing Well)

2.1. Evaluation:

- 2.1.1. Critique of course – good;
- 2.1.2. Critique of course – identifying areas where improvement needed;
- 2.1.3. Group Process.

2.2. Impact of course on participants and leaders:

- 2.2.1. The importance of personal attitude and approach to life (and ageing);
- 2.2.2. Overcoming barriers to positive actions (moving from knowing to experience);
- 2.2.3. Capacity building.

3. Community of the church

- 3.1. Evidence of role church as network and resource and ethos formation
- 3.2. Development of next steps.
- 3.3. Building up of relationships
- 3.4. Role of church in the community

4. Wisdom

- 4.1. Issues of significance / meaning making
- 4.2. The value of the course as creating a space for reflection and sharing.
- 4.3. What helps people to age well (practical wisdom)

5. Peter

- 5.1. Vicar
- 5.2. Researcher

6. Important Other

Sixth node for 'Important Other' things that don't fit the other five nodes (e.g. humour, frustration, absurd, uncategorizable, things that make no sense, margins).

7. Great Quotes

8. God references

With the nodes established, the task was then to analyse and code the transcripts to explore each of these themes to discover what each meant. This was a process of testing and searching for evidence. One aim was to generate an assessment of the course as an action and process. Another aim was to show what had been learnt through the process and give an evidential basis for establishing some new work with older people in this local church and its wider community. Complete transcripts were worked through using NVivo to code sections according to these nodes. The task of analysing the data was an iterative and reflexive process: moving backwards and forwards between different texts and codes, listening for what was resonant and attending to what seemed significant.

Findings from the Transcripts

Node 1: Ageing

1.1 Strengths of Older People

Some of the strengths of older people that came out of the observations and reflections of the hosts included: wisdom in terms of knowledge from life experience;

number and length of relationships with family and friends; that older people can have positive attitudes contrary to some peoples' preconceptions; that older people can have a great awareness of the things that enrich our lives and that those things can be quite simple; that there are lots of things for older people to do in this area; that older people are capable; and that older people can be role models for others including health care professionals – teaching them what it is to be an older person.

1.2 Needs of Older People

This is a summary of the needs that were identified in the reflections.

There was a growing awareness that ageing brings with it many different challenges and yet some of the challenges and questions are the same at any age, but they come into sharper focus at different stages of life. There was a recognition that whilst things are different for different people there can be common ground, for example someone observed that “we have similar fears”. Throughout the course, issues of relationship came up though there was an awareness of the different friendship needs of different people. Relationship needs included: the greater vulnerability of single people; how draining it is to be continually losing friends through bereavement; avoiding isolation; asking for and receiving help from others.

Other needs arise from diminished functions in older age such as the challenge of reading the small print when eyesight deteriorates. The issues of social and technological change happening around was identified, for example the challenges of grappling with

modern technology such as online banking was easy for some but others said they found it not only difficult but hard to trust.

Another broad theme was that of awareness. This might be awareness of ageing itself (“it hit me this morning – I’m *that* age!”), but also there was the growing awareness and acceptance of mortality. Issues around death, dying and bereavement were identified including the financial aspects of being able to pay for care in the later stages of life and to pay for your funeral. Also in retrospect dealing with past experiences of bereavement and letting go of past hurts as one looks back over one’s life. Perhaps linked to this awareness, the need to leave a legacy was also voiced. There also was a clear awareness of needs around body, health, and access to good healthcare.

Although never explicitly addressed, on different occasions throughout the eight weeks of the course spiritual needs were identified both in terms of faith and absence of faith.

1.3 Responses to the needs and strengths

It became evident that even with a relatively small group of older people (14) there was a great range and variety of needs and that they had an equally varied range of responses and strategies for facing these things. One of the hosts observed:

“I was struck at the way people [have] ...different kinds of responses to the challenges and ... for some people they were drawing on some of the vision they'd had all their life...or rather saying actually that they'd had to develop new ways of coping or dealing with stuff in or since retirement. New situations sometimes require

new responses. I think it was significant [that] one-size doesn't fit-all. So it's everything from kind of just accommodating or accepting the situation and sort of fitting yourself round it, there's just dealing with things as they come up one at a time. And then, someone said just a sense of humour, keeping a sense of perspective, lots of different approaches.”

Node 2: The Course (Ageing Well)

2.1 Evaluation

2.2 Impact

2.1.1 Critique of Course – Good

Perhaps the best positive evaluation of the course was in the fact that people came, participated and returned week by week. People interacted well, shared willingly and supported each other in caring ways even if they had only met on the course. It was thought provoking and through the interactions ideas were generated. Each session flowed well and there was a variety of format and a balance between input and interaction (see more under 2.1.3 Process).

Trying to sum-up the overall evaluation of the course, the external facilitator said:

“... altogether I think it's kind of an 80-20 situation. You know, 80 percent of the stuff has gone really well. People have been both the co-leaders and the people who have taken part. The programme has kind of been mostly right. And it is quite a nice position to be in, to say, right, you know, you're kind of breathing out those -- and we are also saying, well, it's good; we're confident with it -- and that means that

we can go on and analyse some of the stuff that hasn't gone so well quite readily, and think about improving something that's already pretty functional. And that's a really exciting situation to be in."

Deep things were touched on but there was often a lightness to it; there was a sense that the group was "getting at the issues." Throughout the course resources were made available and participants signposted on to other sources of information. Most of the guest speakers inspired confidence and enabled a different level of conversation to be held by group members.

There was an intellectual side to the group. One guest speaker commented that "it was lovely to have a group of people where they were addressing the issues of elderly people, but also there was an intellectual content that wasn't just sipping tea and chatting." The course was designed and structured in that way, rather than as a purely social group. People engaged and responded really well. There was challenge too. Lots of participation from the group, even from members who are quite shy. It was positive – often very positive – and people were energized. A large proportion of the participants said that they would like to keep in touch afterwards. The team felt that it would be worthwhile to run it again.

There were lots of positive comments about the sense of welcome and hospitality. The cakes, which one of the hosts made for each week, were very much appreciated. In our final reflection session one of the last comments was from our facilitator:

"It was a lovely, lovely experience like Peter said, I've never seen a course brought in this way and I just really thought about how effective it was though. Hugely grateful for not just the cupcakes, but for everything that everybody has brought all the way through. But it's really nice to see a group of people working as a team because it is actually really rare as well."

2.1.2 – Identifying areas where improvement needed

Consistently throughout the course the area where most improvement was needed was the venue: the room was only just large enough and sometimes felt too small; it was sometimes too hot and stuffy; at times too much external noise from the rest of the community centre (noises from the kitchen, play group in the hall, adult education class having coffee next door, etc.); and the acoustics were not very good for four small groups having conversations at the same time.

One of the hosts (a retired teacher) felt that there was too much discussion without giving out much factual information, even though that was not really the intention of the group process. Other hosts felt that in some of the sessions there was not much content – so that participants did not necessarily “find out more stuff about ageing.” This reveals a level of disagreement, even misunderstanding, about the process we had adopted. Some of the hosts preferred discussion based sessions and others were more comfortable when there was some form of input such as a video or external speaker.

A course like this will attract the more motivated people in the community, because they are the ones who can make the effort to turn up. How can it then be made available to others who are harder to reach, are already isolated, or who are not willing to risk doing something new?

There was a concern that some of the sessions were too deep – touching on matters that were too personal or potentially too painful (relationships and death in particular, but

also the sessions on finances and wills). Sessions where what had been planned did not work as well as hoped were relationships, safety and death and dying.

The exercise that was the central part of the relationships session (session three) would have worked better if a wider range of examples had been provided. If repeated then it would be better to include as an example a relationship with someone who was an acquaintance, such as a shopkeeper. This would enable people to see themselves in a wider network of relationships beyond immediate family and friends.

Session four – Feeling Safe, Keeping Safe – included an activity in which people wrote down things they feared on small cards which were then passed on to the next group. Some of the things that people wrote down were either very similar or rather abstract so that some groups were left with not much to discuss. On reflection it was agreed that the exercise would be better with some prepared cards to which people added their own thoughts so that there was a greater choice of what to discuss.

Another criticism of session four was that some people anticipated from the title that it would be about health and safety in the home, fire safety or locks and that kind of security, rather than about issues of taking risks and overcoming the fears that stop us doing things. We had in our sights the issue of emotional safety (feeling safe), but some participants wanted more on physical safety (keeping safe).

Session six – Death and Dying – was the least successful from the perspective of both participants and hosts. This was partly because it is a tough subject for anyone to face but also because of the way the session was run. One host summed it up this way:

“Well, I didn’t find today as, I was going to say, rewarding. Rewarding is not the right word -- rewarding for me or good for me as previous ones have been. I’m not sure whether that’s because I couldn’t get in to the subject. In some ways, I was struggling to understand the questions as to where we were going to.”

The external speaker who was setting up the group discussions gave the groups too many questions to think about at once and they were not phrased in a straightforward way. One host questioned whether the subject should have been addressed at all, though it was a topic that came up strongly as an important issue in the first stage of the research. There was a group of older people who were finding that when they wanted to bring up the topic of talking about when they died, or planning funerals, then their family did not want to have that conversation. It appeared that the group who came on the course were not ready for that conversation either. In the reflection session one of the hosts suggested that it is hard for participants to anticipate how they will feel when it comes to the reality of discussing the issue; some people found it harder than they expected.

Lots of comments through the reflections concerned whether a particular session might have been better later on in the sequence of the course. The sequence of sessions was constrained by the availability of speakers. In particular the death and dying topic may have followed better from the topic of legal issues because the questions of lasting power of attorney and wills would have led into facing up to our own deaths.

A serious question in terms of format was whether the sessions needed to be slightly longer to allow participants more time to work out what they were being asked to do or to reflect afterwards. This was especially pertinent when dealing with the more challenging

topics. Even an extra quarter of an hour could have made a positive difference without making the sessions too exhausting.

2.1.3 Group Process

The overall assessment of the group process was that it was well organized, the team worked well together and everybody played their part. The interactions were good and everybody contributed and expressed themselves freely, small groups fed back to the whole group so that insights were shared with everybody. When there were technical hitches or someone was not there for that week, other members of the host team covered and filled in the gaps.

The atmosphere was very relaxed and a positive tone had been created. The hospitality of beginning with refreshments and cakes helped people to settle in each week and get to know each other informally. There was often a buzz before the session even started. There was quite a lot of laughter.

Participants tended to sit in the same place each week, although a few individuals did occasionally try a different place. The research team discussed whether it was a good thing for people to be in the same place and on balance decided that it did not matter; if it helped create a sense of safety then it was all right. The hosts tried to ensure that they changed tables so that there was some variety. Hosts also ensured that the people who needed more support were being supported by a host rather than a fellow participant.

The format of having the room set up with four tables in 'cabaret style' arrangement with seats for the participants around the outside meant that people were in a way sitting in a large circle, but easily able to turn inwards to work in small groups. One host observed that "the feeling I got most of all that it was nice and intimate. They [the participants] only felt they were talking between three and four people."

The hosts facilitated the conversations around the table, but realised after a few weeks that it was better not to refer to the small groups by the name of the host e.g. Peter's table. If a table group was named by referring to one of the participants, then they were more likely to feedback the key points from small group discussion to whole group. Having a host on each table was felt to be a major contributory factor to the course running so well:

"but I think some other things that are really liked about this program is the way there's always a facilitator on the group, on the table. That kind of rather strange combination of you knowing people, but also being slightly set aside in this particular role seems to really, really support people through what indeed is challenging topic areas [*sic.*]"

A good proportion of the group (about two-thirds) were members of the church and knew each other to some extent already, and it became clear that there was an already existing group dynamic so that "we were not starting from a standing start... [it] felt like we're probably building on the culture of the church as well as the networks of the church." There were high levels of trust and people were willing to share openly about their experiences and ideas. This was modelled from the start by the hosts who shared appropriately, but quite openly, about their own situations as each new discussion or activity was introduced.

The mix of ways of working was a strength of the course. There was always small and whole group conversation, there was usually some kind of input from a host or the facilitator, or from an external speaker or video. Some weeks, and especially at the beginning, ice-breaker exercises were used, and some weeks there was a creative or craft based activity. This variety helped keep a “very positive energy” and maintained people’s interest.

Node 2.2 Impact of the Ageing Well Course

2.2.1 Impact on personal attitude

One aspect of evaluating the course is trying to assess its impact on the participants and the hosts. Through the transcription process a theme emerged that might be termed ‘personal attitude’ and that was included to see if it were possible to identify ways in which attitude related to ageing well and if whether the course was shaping attitude in any way.

After session two when one participant voiced an opinion in a way which most people experienced as strongly negative the discussion included attitude and ageing. The link between a person’s attitude towards life (positive or negative) and how that person ages was voiced in this way:

Male1: ... and I think that's a big thing that, the personal attitude.

Male2: Yeah.

Male1: And someone's approach to life...

Female1: I must admit --

Male1: ... actually has a big impact on how we age, I think.

We noticed the impact of the course on the participants in different ways. Particularly evident was the way in which certain participants grew in confidence and willingness to contribute:

Male1: Well, potentially, yes. But I thought what was quite interesting about her in relation to your question is that she didn't seem entirely confident about doing new things. So, yes, she is one of the more energetic and motivated people. But at the same time, being part of a group like this will give her connections and confidence, and I felt sure of that listening to her today, should try new --

Female 1: She is very, very shy, yes. At [another] course, she wouldn't say anything unless she had to. And she's much more talkative here.

Female 2: I think she is growing in confidence.

During the discussions after three of the sessions with guest speakers it was noticeable that some of the participants and hosts spoke of feeling a greater sense of confidence. The speakers on money matters, legal issues and health care all seemed to boost people's confidence. Sometimes this was through their specialist knowledge, but in other instances it was because people felt empowered or encouraged or motivated to do something they needed to do. During the session on LPAs one participant kept saying "I'm pleased I've got mine sorted out" – so it was not necessarily about new information but a confirmation that she had done the 'right thing' – she felt really positive.

One observation from the session with the GP was how participants were helped to have a positive attitude towards being more in control of their relationship with their doctor and being more in control of their own health by taking responsibility.

On a different note, one participant at the end gave someone a load of things saying that if they had learnt one thing from the course it was that “I’ve got to start chucking stuff out.” At least, she had been motivated to act.

2.2.2 Overcoming Barriers

Another aspect of impact was to ascertain if there was evidence of the course in some way helping people to overcome barriers that stopped them taking positive steps in relation to their ageing. It was identified that people do have fears that prevent them from getting involved in things that would be beneficial for them. For example, it is easy to say that it is a good thing to keep mentally and physically active or to maintain mobility, but some people can find the social and emotional task of joining a group to do such activities too much.

Taking on something new can feel like a great risk. One participant shared how challenging it had been for her to accept that she needed carers to assist her each day: it had felt like taking a huge risk to make herself dependent and trust this person who was not a member of her family to come into her home. This incident was a very good example of the group at its best as she felt able to share her experience with the whole group in a positive way. It was made even more significant given that the context was a small group discussion of fears which included Alzheimer’s with which she has been diagnosed.

Some of the references in this node are notes of how participants did challenge themselves to do something new. This included things like setting a budget, going gliding, or booking in to discuss making an LPA.

2.2.3 Impact – Capacity Building

One of the aims of the initial proposal was to form and train up a group of local people who could host / lead a course so that it was not dependent on an external trainer having to be bought in every time. The group of hosts all spoke at some point of their growing confidence in presenting, or a sense of greater skill in facilitating the conversations such as knowing when not to speak so that others would not defer and judging when an intervention was needed to bring the conversation back to the topic. One host spoke of how in the end they “felt very proud of myself because I had managed to bring it back...” The same host also said that they had “grown with being involved with the group.”

There was also learning around how to manage the emotions within the group dynamic: the way in which the hosts are “holding the group for everybody else.” The group realised, too, the ways in which they were “not left untouched by it” and that that is probably a good thing.

The external facilitator observed on several occasions how in a short space of time the group had settled into a team and there was an “organic” sense of people working together and everyone knowing the purpose.

Node 3: Community of the Church

The local church is both a network and resource within the local community. A key premise for this research project is that the church can make a contribution to people living

well, including ageing well. In relation to ABCD, the church, as a local association, is a key asset in many different ways including buildings, people, talents, commitment and relationships. It was, therefore, important to see whether this premise was at all evident in the material arising from the Ageing Well course.

3.1 Network and Resource

Something that was not anticipated in the design stage, was the importance of the existing relationships between participants. It was something that the facilitator saw straight away and saw as being of great benefit: “how good the church has been; the church creating and supporting networks of people to help each other, to support each other in both practical and emotional ways.” There was evident amongst the whole group a strong basis of trust right from the start.

After the first session, one host noted that “we were all right because we all are friends and so we all knew each other on the table I was on.” Another host observed “most people knew one another previously.” It should be noted that not all the participants were members of the church. Some had connections with other churches and some had no church connections or faith commitment at all. On most weeks between one third and one quarter of the participants had no church connection. Some of those were friends with people who are church members so the friendship relationships were still there, as part of a community network larger than the church.

One host said that they saw the church as a place that, “whilst not perfect... there is that possibility of creating networks and bonds of friendship and community... it’s one of the

things the church does.” One host’s assessment was that the “the church community is strong – a strong community from the people that attend.” The host team also realised that through sharing in the process of leading the course they were getting to know each other better: “underneath it all, such expertise in talking and understanding... and we don’t know what’s under the surface with people at all, do we?”

The network and resources of the church was seen by one of the hosts as part of God’s provision in this place and as a key factor in making it possible for us to run the course with relative ease.

3.2 Next steps

In the first stages of coding, it seemed that some ways in which the course could be carried on and developed in the wider community might be suggested.

One host envisaged the way the course might develop as being like dropping a “stone in the pool.” In terms of this first run of the course we were “seeing the first ripple... there is no reason why that one ripple should be the whole picture.” One possibility for developing the course came in a discussion about what other sessions might include in the future: one suggestion being to have a practical session on how to keep fit. Another suggestion about how the course could be developed and repeated was to invite participants from the previous run to be hosts on the next run, which would be a way of continuing the capacity building.

3.3 Building up of relationships

The word frequency analysis of the transcribed discussions showed the word 'people' as one of the most frequent (an example of a Word Query is shown in Appendix 12). This suggested that "people" was an important theme to attend to and, in particular, relationships with one another.

Something that was observed in the discussions after the second session on keeping physically and mentally active was how many people emphasised the social side of the activities in which they took part. The activities provided physical and mental stimulation but they also said "it's fun... I meet other people, it gets me out of the house... there is a real community dimension to many of these things." Similarly, it was observed that for church, whilst there is gathering for worship, there are also times when people gather together around a quite different activity. Attending or belonging to church could be a key source of relationships. Hosts reported several participants referring to "my church family." There was also a delicate conversation about how some people within the church community feel frightened to ask for help whilst others seem more willing and able to do so. Others preferred the terminology of companionship.

It was recognised that the course provided an opportunity to meet together for people who might normally talk to each other in one way, to talk in different ways and to think in different ways. The quality of the relationships within the group was commented on: "I kind of saw a lot of trust and affection within the group." There was a trust between participants

and between hosts and participants. Some participants also told the hosts that they were discussing and supporting each other between sessions. For some people the relationships were already there but the course provided an opportunity to build on that and take the relationships a step further.

3.4 The role of the church in the community

The hosting and leading team were operating at something of an interface between the church and the wider community; between the religious and the secular. This was seen both in terms of the mix of people participating and the issue of ageing which affects everyone whether they are part of the church or not. The hosts realised they were “stretching beyond” the immediate church community and the way the subject matter was addressed was often secular: “There was no hint of a religious thing, I think we kept that quite good” one host observed. Another week a different host said “It doesn’t always have to be about religion, does it? Church is just a very broad umbrella that helps in so many different areas.” This theme surfaced again in later reflections when someone observed that one of the participants who did not identify themselves as Christian had said that they felt included because they had thought it was going to be religious and it had not been, and that it was good to bring Christians and non-Christians together.

There was an awareness of the interaction taking place between our Christian faith and the issues of ageing: “... we can sort of very easily shut God into church. What's quite interesting for a course like this, especially ... the kind of interaction between faith and life.” Two different images were used to describe this interaction. One saw it as taking place at the “open edges of the church community”. This was, it was felt, embodied in the choice of

the community centre as a venue which is owned by the church but operated separately: a kind of space which is not entirely neutral because it is linked with the church even though it is not the church. The other image was that of a bridge. This image was used in the context of reviewing the session in which we discussed death and dying. The host's opinion was that "the church is a very, very good bridge between people and death. I feel that the church is very willing to talk about it." The church enables a relationship between people and issues that can be hard to relate to or that others are unwilling to engage with.

Something that one host observed, that I thought was important, was that "the church seems to pick up on doing things like this course that maybe no one else might pick up on. I mean the church has a definite role in these sort of social events like that." As that point was discussed further it was noted that this was not just because of the institution but because of the people who are involved: "people throw themselves into it and this is a classic example... the people who value and understand the community and understand the reaching out to others, building up society." It was noted that in some way church intrinsically creates community and that people in church intentionally create community. There is here an element of obliquity as community is created through the activities of the church even if their primary objective is something else e.g. gathering together for worship.

Node 4: Wisdom

One of the traditional strengths ascribed to elders in society is wisdom, understood most basically as understanding and insight that comes from experience. Wisdom then

seemed an apt theme to look for in the transcripts. More specifically, one of the intentions of the Ageing Well course was to provide an opportunity for older people to share their practical wisdom about living well in later life. So this wisdom node divided into three issues:

1. relating to finding significance or making meaning in later life;
2. assessing the ways in which the course had created a space for reflection and sharing;
3. identifying examples of practical wisdom in terms of what helps people to age well.

4.1 Issues of significance / meaning making

There was a wide range of different ways in which this was touched upon so this node gathers the fragments of lots of different conversations over the nine weeks. The reverence or respect for elders in certain societies and cultures was referred to. One conversation noted the difference between knowledge and wisdom, especially in the time of the internet. A connection was made between harvesting the learning that comes through reflection on lived experience and the wisdom literature in the Bible which is often in the form of collected sayings or proverbs.

When significant issues of meaning came to the surface it always seemed to be experienced in a way the hosts found challenging. The drastic change of perspective on life brought about by retirement was shared in a small group by two participants who had been

able to share how difficult the transition from work had been for them. In another session, the tough question was asked “What is the point?” What is the point of life and growing old or trying to do things to keep yourself going? We discerned behind this question the need for purpose in life and not just doing something for oneself: a bigger-than-me vision (c.f. Frankl, 1962).

Participants were challenged too. In some of the exercises in the course participants were asked to think in ways in which they were not normally used to thinking. Sometimes the level of reflexivity required was found to be hard: thinking about how other people think about you can be demanding, especially if it is not something previously considered. Another challenging reflective exercise came with thinking about death and dying. How one will be remembered or what one’s legacy will be was likened to a spiritual exercise by one of the group: as an exercise it unlocks all kinds of things which can be very revealing.

4.2 Creating space for reflection

One interesting observation from our facilitator came from his working with a group of four participants who were all church members. The group ended up talking a lot about issues of faith in one way and another. He wondered if this was the kind of conversation they would have had in the setting of the church, or whether this rather different space had enabled them to have a religious conversation on their own terms?

Reflecting on the course the hosts recognized that there was a “big willingness to share” and that they were enabling that sharing and supporting that willingness by setting

the tone. These sessions allowed people to talk to each other in different ways from how they might normally talk together. The process of the course put the participants into “a different conversation” with each other. The hosts also recognised that this “different conversation” was potentially disturbing for the participants and that they were contributing to that. There were times when the host’s role was in a way to stir things up. But the strength of the relationships and the trust in the group meant that participants still felt safe. The way they kept coming back was an indication of their willingness to continue participating.

4.3 Practical Wisdom

The kinds of things that people shared from their own experience about what has helped them to age well were: strategies for responding to new situations and challenges; ways of keeping mentally and physically fit; keeping up an optimistic and positive attitude and approach to life; facing up to the ageing process and accepting the realities; taking responsibility for your own health and asking for help when needed.

Node 5: Peter

As a participant observer in the groups it was appropriate when coding the transcripts to look out for things relating to my role as a researching professional. Two nodes were

created: one for references to me as the vicar and the other in relation to my role as a researcher.

5.1 Vicar Role

The session on death and dying prompted me to reflect whilst I can deal with these issues on a professional level with a certain amount of detachment, it is still hard for me to deal with my own grief and to face my own mortality. Participation in the group reflection opened up my own vulnerability. One host's reflection was "You're not different from the rest of us." Of course I am no different but it made me see that others can see the vicar as different.

The other less personal reflection was following the input from the GP on how people can get the most from consultations. The idea behind her presentation was about ways in which, as patients, we could help the GP to help us. The group wondered if I could stand up in church and give a talk on how I can help you (the congregation) to "get the best out of me"?

5.2 Researcher role

There was one quite long discussion after session one about my role as a participant observer. The group recognised that I had to be actively involved and thought it would be more strange and obtrusive if I was trying to sit in a corner pretending to be a non-participant observer. We recognized that there are no neutral positions to take and it was

better to be involved. If I participated in one small group I could not observe the group as a whole but I also participated in the plenary discussions and feedback, and so got a sense of that dimension of the course.

Node 6: Important Other

Node 6 was added as something of a catch-all to try to record any other important things which might be helpful in analysing the transcripts.

Node 6.1 Laughter

There was ready laughter both during the sessions and in the reflection meetings, and this was part of the relaxed and friendly atmosphere that the hosts enabled as this little extract illustrates:

Joan: I think your two friends were very surprised by the amount of laughter.

Felicity: They were, yes.

Joan: I think they thought it was going to be something serious, not very friendly.

Felicity: There was a lot of laughter going around.

Laughter is not always in response to something amusing and can also be mocking, hollow, or bitter; there can be a laughing-at rather than laughing-with someone.

Throughout the course there were no times when the laughter was malicious. There were times when people laughed at themselves – which is more self-reflective. Humour and

laughter were also referred to as ways of coping with things and dealing with subjects that are hard to face head on:

Peter: And the thing about sort of humour and euphemism as the way we manage that, that awareness of our mortality and how uncomfortable it makes us feel.

Sue: And I think sometimes we do deal with it with humour. Because that's the only way we can deal with it.

Peter: It creates a distance, doesn't it?

6.2 Frustration

Relating to the frustration hosts felt around the comment “What’s the point?”, in session 2 (keeping active), which they experienced as very negative, one person shared how they did not handle the comments well and one responded that they “thought it was really sad...”. This became a key incident in reflecting on the course and was one of the more disruptive moments.

6.3 Absurd

Nothing was assigned to this node.

6.4 Margins

Here were noted any comments that seemed tangential or flippant asides. Six parts of the transcript were coded under this node but nothing was judged to be pertinent.

Node 7: Great Quotes

This node was set up to make sure that any comments or quotes that seemed especially good were not lost. Sometimes the coding process felt rather like re-reading a book which had been annotated on a previous reading and getting to a section that was underlined and on this second reading not being able to recall what significance had been seen in it the first time. One reference was assigned to this node but on re-reading the coded sections it did not seem that noteworthy. This reflects the iterative process of analysing transcripts.

Node 8 – God references

Part of the discipline of Practical Theological Reflection is to reflect on and interpret experience in the light of faith, also to see experience as a source of understanding of who God is. This node enabled an attentiveness and alertness to the God-references and God-questions. References to other theological sources such as quotations from scripture, faith practices and traditional theological themes were also noted. On the reflection grid the question “What did I learn about God?” was asked each week as a prompt to make sure the research group included some theological reflection. This was often one of the questions

that the group found hardest to respond to, but each week there was something. These reflections from the transcripts pick up themes in response to that question as well as other times when God was referred to in the conversation.

There were often references to God as watching over us, guiding us, caring for us, accepting and loving us. Hosts referred to God at work amongst us and through us: "God sent [name] to boost my confidence."

Over the different reflection sessions, God was referred in many different ways: as creator, "You see that variety that God's made with the people"; as one who summons, "God calls us to actually do something, and to participate in shaping his kingdom"; as the God of new life, "God has given me a second chance in life"; as protector, a "safety net", and in the way "you've got that sort of protection around you... which in a sense enables you to overcome your fears a lot more easily"; and as comforter, "a reassuring presence" even when facing difficult things.

Several traditional theological themes emerged over the weeks of the course: providence, grace, forgiveness. Our response to God was also framed in traditional ways: to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. This prompted a creative conversation between a host and participant when the host challenged the member of the group about the need to think about who we are and how others see us as a dimension of loving ourselves that we might love our neighbours.

Scripture was quoted in the discussion after session four as we reflected on trust and the theme of safety and taking risks: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on

your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.’
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

Scripture was also misquoted (or misapplied) in the discussion of finances when the external speaker sought to justify the inclusion of a line in our personal budgets for treats like cake with reference to “Man shall not live by bread alone”! This misuse of the text led into a conversation about abundance as opposed to scarcity as the quality and character of God’s provision.

The research team talked about prayer with reference to hosts praying for the sessions of the course and in terms of praying for members of the group between sessions. The group prayed together before the lunch at the beginning of the weekly reflection after each session. Prayer was discussed as a starting point for seeking forgiveness for others and for ourselves. One of the hosts also made a claim for the health benefits of prayer and that people with a strong faith tend to live longer. Prayer was also discussed as a way of dealing with problems: “If you’ve got a problem, give it to God.” Prayer can be a means to let go of burdens as they are talked through with God, it creates space to mull things over, and prayer as listening allows for new directions to be discerned.

There was something creative and generative in the encounter between people on the course. Through the process of the group meeting week by week, community and fellowship were being formed. Friendships were made and deepened. There was a quality of invitation to the discussions and suggestions. The challenge of this and every stage of life was acknowledged and greeted. The hosts witnessed the way faith or spirituality is rooted in

our lived experience: our “reach for God comes out of where we are: I think I saw that happening today.”

Summary Conclusions

The process of transcribing and then analysing was laborious and lengthy, it required perseverance and attentiveness. It is an illustration of the way the AR process draws in different techniques and methods as required. The sifted ideas and emerging themes suggest fresh understandings of the experience of ageing and possible practical ways forward for pastoral response. The next chapter is an evaluation and interpretation of the data presented above. Two points seem significant to draw out as a conclusion at this juncture.

Reflecting on the way the course ran, and supported by the analysis of the data, it became clear that the way the group worked, the formation and development of community life, is, in itself, a major finding. There is something vital in the way that church intrinsically creates community and that people in church intentionally create community.

One reflection noted the interaction between faith and life and the language used to articulate it. The research group sometimes struggled with the challenge to reflect theologically in an explicit way. This seems to be a consequence of the intention behind the course which is not designed to focus on issues of Christian faith. For example, had the course been designed as a Bible study course for older adults or focussed in some way on traditional Christian practices, such as prayer, then the theological reflection would have

come more easily. Working at the interaction between faith and daily life group members found it harder to draw on Christian language. However, the hosts did not struggle at all with living out Christian practices such as offering hospitality, befriending, and showing care and compassion to others. This points to the formation of Christian community as being about more than words and the importance of learning such practices over time within the community of the church. What is more those embodied values can be put into practice at the edges of the church community and not just with those whom are already part of it.

CHAPTER 7.

EVALUATION, INTERPRETATION AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

This chapter presents an interpretation of the results of the Ageing Well action within the overall PAR project and seeks to draw out emergent ideas by making connections with the wider literature on ageing. With reference back to the characteristics of AR identified by Eden and Huxham, this chapter presents the ‘emergent theory’ which is developed incrementally and elaborated from practice; a synthesis of research data and the practice of the theory that formed the intention of the research (Eden and Huxham, 2002, p. 260). The knowledge arising from this research has been jointly created with the participants, in particular the hosts, and myself as a researching professional. This research is an attempt to learn from older people and the conviction is that researching in this participative way is more ethical and will produce ‘better knowledge’ (Tanner, 2010, pp. 2, 25; Ray, 2007, pp. 73-87). I would also see this as making a contribution to ‘knowledge-based practice’, which seeks to include both the tacit knowledge of practitioners and the ‘lived experience of service users’ (Glasby and Beresford, 2006, p. 268). A fully rounded understanding of later life must include the views, insights and experiences of older people.

Overall Evaluation

The ‘Ageing Well’ course was a success: it ran well; people attended regularly and participated fully; most of the sessions were well received; the overall participant feedback

was highly appreciative and positive. In my journal I noted the 'positive atmosphere', the 'growing confidence of the team', and 'the sense that this is going well.'

The strengths-based approach of the course was realised in the sessions and helped to shape a positive attitude amongst participants: one feedback form noted, "Yes, feel more positive this week – risks are worth taking." As well as that changing attitude towards themselves and their experience of ageing, people left better informed about the topic under discussion or encouraged to do something.

Relationships grew amongst the participants and between the members of the host team. Some new friendships were made on the course, but more often we saw a deepening of relationship between people who had met before but who, through taking part in the course, got to know each other better. The course enabled 'a different conversation' (p. 124 above) to take place. Through these conversations a sense of community grew up which I hope will be one of the lasting fruits of the process. The other lasting fruit is the skill and confidence of the host team which was formed through the preparation, delivery and reflection process of running the course. There was a capacity-building as well as community-building benefit to the project.

Interpretation

The Ageing Well course demonstrated the intrinsic value in bringing people together for purposeful and supported conversation around an issue that is personally important to them. Gathering people in this way and giving them the opportunity to share their

experience, perspectives, opinions and wisdom was mutually instructive, life-affirming and enjoyable for them. The structures of support provided by the course and the hosts enabled a deeper sharing around difficult and emotionally charged subjects. The intentionality of the course contributed to its success and enabled something that would not be possible in a chance encounter between a few friends. It was more than just a group for people to meet together and share their views and stories; it had a structure with a beginning, middle and end, as well as a clear ethos and aims. This confirms something that I experienced in earlier stages of the project: people really appreciated the opportunity to meet and discuss this issue, which is personally important to them, in a purposeful and supported way.

The Value of the Process

The process of the Ageing Well course was one of gathering people together to share their experiences and learn from one another in an enabling and supportive environment. I propose that part of what was going on for participants in that process was something that helped affirm and even create their own understanding of later life. This fits with Tanner's model of 'sustaining the self' (2010, pp. 155-7). The course contributed to the participants' sustaining of themselves: affirming their identity; showing them ways of keeping going; and showing ways of reducing threats by drawing on appropriate resources. This view depends on a social model of the self rather than seeing the self as defined by individual attributes. Swinton has convincingly shown how such a social model, based on Sabat's idea of the self, can pertain to an understanding of personhood and dementia: even in severe forms of dementia the self can remain intact if there is no failure of community (Swinton, 2012, pp.

94-98). This model of the self as 'constructed within the relational dialectic' (p. 94) has three aspects: personal identity; physical and mental attributes; and social personae. That third part of the self, which is presented to the world, depends on the co-operation and assistance of others for its existence. The supportive and affirming relationships experienced on the Ageing Well course contribute to that maintenance of the social self. The sharing of reflections on lived experiences requires not just people willing to listen, but a relationship of mutual trust that makes the space in which to share a safe environment.

This might also helpfully be related to the work of Brandtstädter and Greve (1994), whose model of ageing involves the stabilization and protection of the person's sense of self. This model emphasizes continuity and permanence of self-concept as the ageing self develops. Here the term 'self' refers to the cognitions a person has of his or herself, such as their attributes and dispositions (p. 53). Other attributes that support this are discriminative relevance (what distinguishes them from others) and biographical meaningfulness. That sense of individual distinctiveness within the sharing of peoples' experiences led me to see the limitations of an essentialist view of ageing.

A Non-Essentialist Approach

One of the key theories that emerges from the Ageing Well research is that it is not possible to say there is one thing that people need because they are now in later life. Older people are not a specific entity or group identified by the attribute of being old; it follows that they do not have a common set of needs because of the fact that they are old. Whilst

some things become more likely or come more sharply into focus, nearly all the issues that older people face can be experienced by people at different ages and stages of life. There is no simple, comprehensive experience of ageing to which the church can respond. Even in a small group, from one local community, such as the participants in the Ageing Well course there is a broad, diverse and complex range of experience. As will be discussed below there are generalities of experience and there are some specific needs that can be addressed but these do not exist because the people in the group are old.

This is an important finding in terms of shaping the pastoral strategy of a local church. We cannot say that there are these specific tasks to be done in response to particular needs that arise because of the fact that a certain population are older people. People are always different and age is only one defining factor in a wide range of other influences. Most of the things that the older people in this community experience can be experienced by anyone else at a different stage of life, whether it is role-loss; physical frailty; isolation; exclusion; loneliness; bereavement; financial difficulties; or poor health. Furthermore, the pastoral response is only partially determined by the age of the person in need, so in most cases the response is similar for people of any age, whether it is enabling the person to participate in the community in a new way; offering support; prayer or other form of ministry; referral to a specialist; listening; advice; counselling; befriending; or whatever else may be appropriate.

An essentialist understanding of people's experience of ageing is not a helpful starting point. Rather, it is more helpful to recognize that people are engaged in an ongoing work of sustaining their self-identity in the light of their experience of growing older. Peoples' sense of identity is often remarkably resilient whilst at the same time engaging in a process of

negotiation with their possible selves. The resilience of this sense of identity fits with a continuity theory as people keep the story of their lives going with a basic structure that persists over time (Atchley, 1989, p. 83). A threat to a person's continuing sense of self as they age is the dominant deficit concept of ageing that is culturally communicated to people. As Tanner puts it: 'Old age can be seen as bestowing a discredited identity in western society and problems that may be associated with later life, such as declining mobility or memory loss, pose threats to valued self- and social identities as an independent person' (2010, p. 21). Challenging this deficit model of ageing was part of the ethos of the course and is discussed further below.

The ageing process and the transition into later-life presents challenges to the way a person sees themselves. One way to conceptualize this is in terms of 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius, 1986). These 'selves' can be ideal or hoped-for, or feared or dreaded (Frazier *et al.* 2002, p. 308). They are domain specific, guiding action and influencing decisions with regard to what to expend effort on and what to abandon (Smith and Freund, 2002). Individuals reframe their possible selves in response to life transitions motivated by the desire to preserve well-being (Cross and Markus, 1991). One of the most important findings from research in this area is that the motivation associated with a person's possible-self functions well into very old age (Smith and Freund, 2002, p. 498), and later life is still a period in which people experiment with new possible selves. We saw a high level of motivation amongst participants in the course and a real willingness to engage with the group conversations as different themes were explored.

If we are to seek to promote older people's well-being, then focusing on the experiences of older people and sharing strategies that support their sense of self through the process of ageing can generate valuable insights for practice as the church community helps people maintain and negotiate their roles and identities; this correlates to other research that confirms people are 'keen to maintain and develop their own identities as they grow older and continue to engage with others, and use and share their skills and experiences' (Croucher and Bevan 2012, p. 11). Because of the strengths-based approach of the course we were especially seeking to explore how selfhood is supported during the process of ageing. This happened through the creation of a place and a process through which people who are living through similar situations and dealing with similar issues could meet and share their views and experiences, their ideas, resources and coping strategies. Through this sharing they had the opportunity to gain a new perspective on their situation, to receive new information that might be helpful, and in some ways to reframe their thinking about their lives.

Generalities of Experience

Whilst wishing to make the case for a non-essentialist approach to ageing it is, nevertheless, possible to recognize within the Ageing Well participants some generalities of experience both in terms of strengths and in relation to the life issues they face. One question to be discussed further below is the extent to which it is then possible to generalise further to the wider local community.

At an early stage of implementing the action we recognized the capacity of people to form relationships, and with a supportive environment for those relationships to become deeper. This makes possible conversation and reflection on subjects not otherwise articulated. People find within themselves and from others the resources to address the situations they face which can sometimes be challenging or fearful. We witnessed a surprising depth of engagement between people and some of the interactions were between people who had not met before: the course was making possible something that would otherwise not have happened. In relation to the role of church in the community we also saw that the relationships that existed prior to the course amongst church members was a strength in itself – part of the social capital of the community and an asset to draw on in responding to ageing and developing work with older people.

It is also possible to say that participants in the course faced a range of common experiences. As noted above these are not exclusively experienced by older people and so are not some essential defining part of later life. However, they can be experienced more frequently with increased age and in certain respects come into sharper focus. So, for example, the experience of role loss at retirement is not dissimilar to that of role loss when someone is made redundant, but retirement becomes more likely with age such that there is a population of people aged 60-70 who are all facing up to the transition from full time paid employment into retirement and the new identity of being pensioners.

Another experience of loss is that of bereavement. The loss of a loved one can be experienced at any age, but what comes into focus with this age range is the more frequent loss of peers which can (though does not necessarily) lead people to reflect on their own

mortality. Participants also noted the fear of Alzheimer's or dementia, which are examples of the experience of diminishment that can come with age and which seems to become more likely with increased age. Although these fears become more pressing, there can still be a reluctance or even resistance to acknowledging them or facing them in a group setting. The challenge of forming a group with relationships that are trusting and robust enough to bear the weight of these conversations is something we deliberately tried to address in the design and running of the group.

Finding meaning and purpose

The issue of the search for meaning and purpose in life arose in the critical incident in week 2 of the course when in response to the video on keeping mentally and physically active one person asked, "what is the point?" The issue was also evident in discussions around leaving a legacy. For people in the post-parental and post-employment stage of life, the sense of what it might mean to be living successfully looks different from the earlier stages of life which are more focussed on the relationship with a partner, the nurture of children or the pursuit of a career. These things bring with them a sense of doing something worthwhile or adding value, and without them doubts can arise about the value of day-to-day tasks. Indeed, as the participant voiced it: what is the point of keeping mentally and physically active if there is no one to care for and nothing purposeful to do? Finding or making meaning in life as something intrinsically valuable is a challenge in a culture which gives greatest value to functionality.

The role of religious belief and practice in the search for meaning is relevant, and has been shown to be of especial value in later life. Although this issue arose out of discussions during the course, it was not addressed explicitly in the course or promoted as a strategy for ageing well. The hosts all readily drew on their religious perspectives and commitments as a resource for reflecting on the experience of helping to lead the course. In terms of purpose and meaning, the primary belief articulated was of God watching over us: supporting, strengthening, guiding, providing, present, faithful and, therefore, worthy of trust.

In his reflection on later life and medical care in the light of human mortality, Gawande explores 'the fundamental human need for a reason to live' (2014, p. 123). Reflecting on Maslow and drawing on Royce's *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, Gawande says that people need a cause beyond themselves. What makes life worth living is different for different people and will change with personal circumstances and stage of life. Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' (Maslow, 1943) would suggest that safety and survival would remain foundational life-goals, and our first priorities, especially when life is under threat. However, Gawande observes that: 'People readily demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their safety and survival for the sake of something beyond themselves, such as family, country, or justice. And this is regardless of age' (Gawande, 2014, p. 93). People's changing motivations over time do not fit with the theoretical hierarchy. Drawing on Carstensen's 'socioemotional selectivity theory', Gawande suggests that the change in people's needs and desires is not to do with age but rather with perspective: 'your personal sense of how finite your time in this world is' (Gawande, 2014, pp. 94-95). Whatever age you are, when horizons contract and the future is more uncertain and finite, your focus of attention shifts 'to the here and now, to every day pleasures and the people closest to you' (p. 97). People's needs in later life are for more

safety and security, there is a need for everyday comforts and for companionship, but also for achieving modest aims even if they are more present-oriented and emotion-related goals. Often it is the simple things that bring the most pleasure (and the lack of them can bring a sense of sadness and loss) but services do not always seem to be very good at delivering 'the ordinary' (Blood, 2013, p. 11).

Beyond the desire for these simple pleasures there is a human need to see ourselves as part of something greater. Beyond the self-actualization at the top of Maslow's hierarchy, there is the possibility of a desire for transcendence which is to see others achieve their potential. With the change of perspective that comes with an awareness that time is finite, comes a decrease in ambition for personal success and a greater concern to leave a legacy for others. A few conclusions become clear when we understand this: that our most cruel failure in how we treat the sick and the aged is the failure to recognize that they have priorities beyond merely being safe and living longer; that the chance to shape one's story is essential to sustaining meaning in life; that we have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, our culture, and our conversations in ways that transform the possibilities for the last chapters of everyone's lives (Gawande, 2014, p. 243).

Research into how older adults create positive meaning for themselves shows a range of optimization strategies, many of which were employed in the sessions of the Ageing Well course. One such strategy is the anticipation of events beyond the individual's control, particularly those caused by biological ageing. To balance that, another strategy is to learn to reduce excessive self-criticism and increase self-acceptance by changing standards of evaluation, such as letting go of ideas of future self-realization and considering goals as

attained. It has been observed that 'Threats to one's life, or to important values and satisfactions as they may occur in mid-life and old age, seem to stimulate the development of new meanings, such as more comprehensive or less vulnerable concepts for self-evaluation and personal existence' (Dittman-Kohli, 1990, pp. 291-4). Older people also use life themes as building blocks for identity and to attribute meaning and purpose to their lives (Arber and Evandrou, 1993).

Specificity of Experience

Alongside the non-essentialist interpretation of the human experience of ageing on a species level, and the general experiences that are identifiable on a social level, there are also some things on the personal level that, whilst specific to this group, are worth paying attention to for the sake of informing professional practice. One of my personal commitments regarding this research is to understand ageing as experienced by the people who are members of this local church and community; trying to see things from their point of view and, in a way, embracing that subjectivity as a way of grounding, and possibly critiquing, the abstract and general insights from theories of ageing. The purpose of this approach is to learn something of how older people themselves are managing their own experience of ageing and how they find and offer support. A key focal point within this developing understanding is to discern what part the church can play in this community where there was a perception that "we were not doing enough for older people." There is also an important emphasis here on trying to focus on the issues that the people in this community thought were relevant to them and their neighbours. This, for me, is an

important principle in community development that it has to begin with what this specific group of people are interested in and willing to commit to.

Through the process of reflecting on the course there was evidence from the hosts of a great deal of personal learning about their understanding of ageing and also about themselves as people who were capable of working together to design and lead this kind of process. In the comments the hosts made about what they had learnt about themselves there were many occasions when they reflected positively on how pleased they were to find they could perform in this role of hosts which involved presenting to the whole group and facilitating small group work. They learnt about themselves in relation to others including things they found difficult to do or engage with (listening, reflecting publicly on difficult experiences of illness, perceived poor performance, and dealing with difficult topics and emotions). The hosts were learning, too, about their own ageing and their own responses to the material we were discussing, such as, for example, one host saying “I need to consider doing an LPA for myself.” They also experienced the sense of challenge that came from some of the harder topics we covered: after the session on death and dying, one host recorded that they had learned about themselves that “however much I am able to talk about death yet there is still a lurking fear of it even though I know that as a Christian there is no need to.” The hosts were themselves participants and were personally affected by the way that they engaged with the course.

Learning for this local Church

Under the category of specific experience, one further area of interpretation relates to the action learning that has taken place for this local church. What have we learned about the community and the church? In the literature (as reviewed in Chapter 2) there is good evidence for the role of religion in promoting wellbeing, but I was curious to see whether this would be a theme that emerged in our action learning. I also wondered how or in what ways the church would be seen to contribute to wellbeing.

In the reflections after each session of the course, key themes that we discussed were around fostering relationships and building community, also around the possibilities for personal and community engagement that arise from such relationship and the church as a resource for sustaining and promoting such engagement. So, for example, hosts recognized ‘The importance and value of being together and sharing’, and that, ‘We all need other people in some way or other and cannot live well in isolation’, and that ‘Places like churches and community centres [are] vital for bringing people together.’ We identified that the church provided, ‘Lots of resource and willingness to reflect – lot of mutual affection and trust’; ‘There are rich resources of skills and wisdom to be drawn upon’. The Ageing Well course was seen as in some way embodying or expressing these possibilities: ‘Good supportive conversations going on after the session between members which shows community spirit is high’; ‘It was interesting to hear a non-church speaker urging the importance of community’; and lastly, ‘How important it is for the church to reach out to the community... Christians and non-Christians working together for the common good.’

For many older people religion is an ordinary community resource, providing various forms of support and relationship. About two-thirds of the participants in the Ageing Well course were members of local churches and this gave them both a sense of belonging and network of relationships. In general terms, the wider literature points to religious belief being associated with perceptions of well-being and quality of life (Nilsson *et al.*, 1998). One of the ways that it helps is through providing support to self-affirmation strategies (Coleman *et al.*, 2002) and by supporting personal coping, facilitating social engagement and community participation (Godfrey *et al.*, 2004). The church community provides a social network and a potentially wide range of relationships. Quality relationships have been shown to be a source of support (Cordingley *et al.*, 2001) and contribute to well-being (Stevens, 2001; McMunn *et al.*, 2006).

The Ethos of the Ageing Well Course

Reflecting on the experience of the Ageing Well course there are three further themes that emerge which relate to the ethos adopted.

Challenging a Deficit Model of Ageing

There are good grounds from the educational and gerontological literature to challenge a deficit model of ageing (Arber *et al.*, 2014, 150ff). There are many myths about older people which influence prejudices at the individual and societal level and which

contribute to the deficit model (Withnall *et al.*, 2004). Older people's perception of their own worth and abilities is shaped by societal and cultural values. Several participants in the Ageing Well course referred to themselves as being "on the scrap heap", and these are people who are still active and contributing to local organizations including the church.

The ability of people in later life not only to participate in courses, but also to gain positive benefits from, and to keep on, learning is recognized. Whilst fluid intelligence declines with age, crystallised intelligence (acquired through experience and reflection and associated with wisdom) has been found to remain stable or even increase (Glendenning, 2000). Maintaining an active life and engaging in a range of social and cognitive activities offers some protection against decline (Hanna-Pladdy and MacKay, 2011). Later life can be a period of profound creativity – reflection on own stories, personal healing, problem solving (Boulton-Lewis, 2010; Hickson and Housley, 1997). There is value in a programme for older adults being structured and facilitated in the way the Ageing Well course was: interpersonal qualities of staff working with older people is of crucial importance as is the use of humour, clear visual and aural stimuli, stress-free activities and avoiding timed tasks (Duay and Bryan, 2008).

Raising Awareness – Positive Attitude (Strengths based) – Information / Resources

A premise of the course was to recognize the importance of a positive mindset for ageing well. This was modelled for participants in a strengths-based approach; seeking to build on what is strong in people's lives rather than draw attention to what they or other

people see as being wrong with them. There is strong evidence that people's feelings about themselves and the worlds in which they live affect their sense of well-being and quality of life, which in turn affects their health (Bryant *et al.*, 2012; Clough *et al.*, 2006, p. 72; Diener and Larson, 1984; Ostir *et al.*, 2004). Older people themselves perceive the personal value of having a positive attitude in maintaining their sense of self (Tanner, 2010, pp. 109-111).

Mindset shift: Focus on well-being, prevention of possible problems, and promotion of positive practices.

The Department of Health White Paper 'Our health, our care, our say' set out the theme of promoting independence, choice and control and putting service users at the heart of services (2006). Since then there has been an increased shift in policy from prevention to promoting well-being (see Tanner, 2010, 33f). The New Economics Foundation (Aked *et al.*, 2008) was commissioned by the Foresight Team to review the evidence about how individuals can improve well-being, with well-being being summed up as 'feeling good and functioning well'. The promotion of well-being is seen as a legitimate aim of policy and these proposals of the NEF are an attempt to redefine wealth in terms of well-being. They propose 'five ways' intended to provide a way of understanding what well-being is in practice and give tools to enable individuals to improve their personal well-being. They are:

- connect: with the people around you;
- be active: keep moving;
- take notice: environmental and emotional awareness;
- keep learning: try something new at any age;

- give: help others and build reciprocity and trust.

They are, in so many words, about maintaining personal relationships, keeping physically active, nurturing in oneself a sense of wonder and curiosity, continuing to learn and do new things, and being part of something that is bigger-than-you such as a local community group by giving of time, energy and commitment. These are evidenced-based actions that are recommended for people to incorporate into their daily lives. The report claims they are supported by a developing, broad and compelling evidence base, but as a proviso notes that there is not, as yet, evidence available from epidemiological or longitudinal studies, so it is not possible to demonstrate a causal link between these practices and an increase in personal well-being (Aked *et al.*, 2008, p. 3).

The NEF model suggests that these actions work by supporting good functioning. Each action contributes to a person's 'mental capital' (resilience, self-esteem, cognitive capacity and emotional intelligence) and 'well-being' (good feelings day-to-day and overall happiness, satisfaction) in a kind of 'positive feedback loop' (pp. 13-14). They work at an individual rather than societal level, and the actions have been chosen on the criteria that they are something that a person is able to do for themselves. An important consideration for this work was on how the five ways can be communicated and promoted through a variety of methods to people of all ages.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between this report and the process and content of the Ageing Well course. The process invited people to participate in a community, to reflect on their experience, to learn about ageing, and to share of their wisdom. Amongst other themes. the content of the course included material on

relationships, trying new things and keeping active. Each of the 'five ways to well-being' was present in the Ageing Well course, which we found to make a positive contribution to the well-being of those who participated in it. As a kind of triangulation, the findings of the NEF report can be seen to validate the approach and actions undertaken in this research.

Impact on me as a Researching Professional

The main impact of the programme on my professional work has been something of a shift in my mind-set about how I approach certain aspects of my work. This mind-set shift is a move towards seeing my role as being one of creating community and making connections between people and resources rather than being a provider of resources. Building up a team of local people who then have the skills and capacity to run the programme themselves with me in a supporting role is a change both in my way of working and a challenge to the general expectations of the role of the vicar. This is a shift of focus towards development and away from relief. I still understand my role primarily as a pastoral one but I have become aware of the limitations of this approach – especially in terms of my limited capacity – and also the shadow side of this approach which can too easily create dependency.

I see here a resonance with ecclesiological reflection on the role of the professional clergy in the twenty-first century. Croft sees that the present generation of ministers are called to 'transitional leadership' (2002, p. 160) as the church moves away from traditional structures to new and emerging ways of being church. Different skills are required of clergy,

and a different understanding of their role. Green sees the trained theologian working as an *'animator'*, with the role being exercised *'within and as members of groups'* (1990, p. 124 [italics original]). If the mind-set shift that I have experienced through this research is to become effectively embedded in my continuing professional practice, then there is still much personal and theological reflection to be done. The danger of the idea of *'transitional leadership'* is that it becomes a dual role with a split identity, maintaining traditional and *'re-imagined'* forms of ministry (Heywood, 2011, pp. 199-207). The intentional formation of groups for learning together in community for those inside and on the edge of church life is one possible model to develop. As the Ageing Well course illustrated, the good functioning of such groups depends on a clear ethos and purpose, the practice of hospitality, a facilitating model of leadership, the recognition and development of people's skills and a structure for involving them in the leadership of the group. The course has also demonstrated that the relationships between church members and their networks into the wider community are an existing asset that can be built upon in order to develop the community of the church.

Summary Conclusion

The theoretical space made possible by the PAR process allows for the generation of emergent theory from the phenomenological raw data gathered from the observations of and reflections on the action. Having evaluated the Ageing Well course as a worthwhile action with beneficial impacts on the participants, the main task of this chapter has been to

present an interpretation of the findings. The interpretive process has been one of connecting emerging concepts and triangulating them with the wider literature.

One of the key findings is that there is value in the process dimension of bringing people together into a supportive learning community, with the suggestion that the benefit lies in affirming and sustaining a person's sense of self in relation to their still emerging identity as an older person. To be an older person does not determine a person's identity nor does it define their needs. There is a continuity between being in later life and the earlier stages of life. Because of ageist deficit models of ageing, older age can bestow a sense of identity such that people see themselves negatively. The Ageing Well course attempted to counter that with a strengths-based approach, valuing and affirming people's experience and encouraging them to make a positive contribution through sharing that wisdom born of experience. Amongst the assets that the course valued were the strength and depth of relationships already existing amongst participants. The church community not only offers a source of relationship but a resource for exploring themes of meaning and purpose in life.

The ethos of the Ageing Well course was seen to relate to a move in social policy towards the promotion of well-being and positive practices. Any such change in policy requires a mind-set shift in practitioners. Similarly, I experienced a shift in my own thinking about the role as a professional clergyperson; a theme that will require further reflection and development. The promotion of *well-being* and the idea of *ageing-well* points to the need for further reflection on what it is to flourish as human beings throughout the life

course and, especially, what that might mean for persons living into the diverse reality of older age.

CHAPTER 8.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT AGEING WELL

In this chapter I draw conclusions from the Ageing Well course as an action within the overall PAR project and reflect on what it contributed to my learning about how we might develop our work with older people in this context.

Normalizing Ageing

Growing old is normal; human beings age. From birth to adulthood is usually termed development (as the body grows to maturity), from the point where development stops we begin gradually to age and grow old. Thanks to modern medicine and housing many of the things that might in the past have caused an early death have been minimised. In the West, many people expect to live into later life. The normal expectation, and wish, is to live to be old and not to die young. Despite this, the reality of ageing is often portrayed in negative terms and public discussion of ageing most often frames the issue as a problem for society.

There was something wonderfully unremarkable about the Ageing Well course. Here was a group of older people, of a mix of ages within the fifty-five to ninety range; none were frail or dependent. They came together to discuss a range of topics in an engaged, positive, encouraging way. Some came with specific issues, some did feel as if they were no longer useful or were worried about the meaning of life at this age. This, too, is reasonable and to

be expected. People participated well and left either better informed or encouraged to continue living as well as they can or both. My reflection on this is that the Ageing Well course gave people the reassurance that they were not alone, that the issues they were facing were shared with others, in short: that they were normal. There is something reassuring in this and, even though it seems rather unremarkable, I think there is something important and significant here.

In seeking to respond to the perceived need that, as a church community, 'we are not doing enough for older people', it is important first to reframe the issue. Initially it was framed as a deficit: we are not doing enough; there is a need that is not being met; there is a problem to be solved; older people are a problem; we need to do more to fix this. Reframing the issue gives a different perspective: there is a significant number of older people in our church and wider community; most are living actively and independently; they have a lot of life experience and abilities; they are all very different and have different circumstances; there are some challenges that older people face; perhaps there are ways we can gather people together to share experiences, learn from each other, support and encourage each other and provide people with the information they would like to know.

This is not to say that the original identification of the issue was wrong; nor is it to say that the church community does not need to make a pastoral response; and, indeed, we may well not be doing enough for older people. But how we approach the issue determines how we interpret the situation which shapes how we respond. Treating older people as a needy section of the population, who demand more resources that have to be brought in from outside the community, can have detrimental consequences. Recognizing that the

many older people in the church and community are a rich resource, both for each other and for the wider community, and that they have much to offer given the opportunity, looks and feels very different and the actions that follow from that recognition are much more sustainable.

To be normal is to occupy the broad central section of the bell-shaped normal distribution curve, and this is arguably an under-researched middle ground of contemporary life. Pattison (2011), in an unpublished reflection on the 'ignored middle', identifies the way people look 'through' the middle 'to the more interesting extremes and the problems beyond.' In this way the experience, concerns and interests of those in the middle are 'unacknowledged', and because these are largely unexamined and un-researched there is effectively an absent centre to our understanding of present-day lived experience. A consequence of this lack of attention is that 'the vast majority of ordinary human moral practice, belief and experience is not taken seriously or systematically developed.' The practices of the middle are largely left 'un-nurtured'. The Ageing Well project has, in a way, been an attempt to focus attention on the experience and issues of a section of the population who are seldom attended to and to offer nurture in the practice of living at this stage of life. That the project unfolded in a largely uncontroversial way is perhaps all part of the territory; being in the middle it was never going to be very 'edgy'. The extent to which the concerns of this group are not normally considered is precisely what makes them worthy of attention and research (Pattison, 2011).

Asserting that the un-dramatic experience of ordinary older people is normal is a significant counterweight to the tendency to focus only on the problematic aspects of an

ageing population. The public discourse around ageing is so often about the challenge of dementia care, the expense of providing for the frail and dependent, or the burden on the health and social services. Such a discourse has the effect of problematizing the whole of ageing, and ignoring the wider experience which is often no more problematic than other stages of life. It may seem self-contradictory to argue that the unrecognized middle is, in effect, marginalized. Rather, what this points to is that the lived-experiences of older people are ignored because it is in the middle; it can also be treated as in some way 'other', or labelled as a problem, because it is difficult. This project has sought to attend to the ordinary, even majority, lived experience of people in older age and see it not as a problem to be solved but as a normal stage of life to be lived as well as possible.

Strategies for Helping People to Age Well

The five main strategies for helping people to age well that emerged through our planning, implementing and reflecting on the Ageing Well course are:

- a strengths-based approach (positive attitude);
- raising awareness of issues with provision of information and resources;
- a focus on well-being;
- a focus on prevention of problems;
- and the promotion of positive practice.

What helps people to age well is a range of rather ordinary and, in themselves unremarkable things which, if they can be brought together, then create the conditions for people to find well-being in later life:

- Keeping active – maintaining basic mobility;
- Taking risks;
- Being responsible for oneself – resources to make that possible;
- Having a sense of purpose;
- Basic health;
- Good nutrition;
- Supportive community / network of friends and family;
- Finding life worthwhile;
- Being valued as having someone with something offer / give.

This seems relatively straightforward to provide. Indeed, much of it was within the framework of the Ageing Well course that we developed. It resonates with Gawande's reflection on geriatric care as being about providing some rather routine and low-level interventions which are very effective but undervalued because they are preventative and less dramatic than medical care. He imagines what might happen if there was a medical intervention that could deliver the same outcomes:

If scientists came up with a device—call it an automatic defrailer— that wouldn't extend your life but would slash the likelihood you'd end up in a nursing home or miserable with depression, we'd be clamoring [*sic*] for it. We wouldn't care if doctors had to open up your chest and plug the thing into your heart. We'd have pink-ribbon campaigns to get one for every person over seventy-five. Congress

would be holding hearings demanding to know why forty-year-olds couldn't get them installed... Instead, it was just geriatrics. The geriatric teams weren't doing lung biopsies or back surgery or insertion of automatic defrainers. What they did was to simplify medications. They saw that arthritis was controlled. They made sure toenails were trimmed and meals were square. They looked for worrisome signs of isolation and had a social worker check that the patient's home was safe. (Gawande, 2014, p. 45).

Critique

One self-critical question that I have tried to reflect on after completing the Ageing Well course is 'have I just dodged the hard stuff?' The course was set up with a very positive framework and approach and attracted people who were interested in the idea and motivated enough to attend. In that way the participants were self-selecting in favour of people already ageing well and likely to continue doing so. What about the people who are not ageing well, and for whom later life is a struggle? What about the people who are not motivated to leave their homes or who cannot participate in a group or course because of their health? There are also significant issues of poverty locally, especially pensioner poverty, and we did not engage seriously with that issue.

My response to this line of critical reflection is, first, to restate that this was an action that emerged from the research process and with reference to my steering group; it was not just something chosen on a whim by me as an individual or without any scrutiny of the idea. The intention of the course was also to be an heuristic device within the research, as a means of generating information about the needs of older people in the church and

community and about how the church can respond to those needs. It was never intended as some kind of total solution to the needs of all older people in this community.

What is more, as a designed and planned action it had the chosen approach of a strength-based ethos, informed by the principles of ABCD, chosen because that was discerned as being the most apt methodology and the most likely to generate answers to the research question. With regard to issues of recruitment, it was an open invitation and a range of people did attend, who did have a variety of personal challenges in their lives. I accept that it was not really accessible to those people who might be termed hard-to-reach. However, any attempt to engage seriously with a different target group would have required a different action and may well have been beyond the present capacity of the church. Part of the philosophy of ABCD is to start either where people already are or where they can be readily gathered around an area of common interest. From that starting point, as capacity grows, the circle of engagement can be expanded to include others. There was a deliberate choice of the project as a possible first step in a wider outward movement. An important pragmatic constraint is to do what is achievable, especially when that is a focussed research project and not an open-ended very long term development scheme. Right at the beginning of the research project I chose to focus on older people whose needs were not primarily ones that needed to be met by professional health or social care provision. Such provision is beyond the capacity of the church to address even if individual persons remain valued members of the extended church fellowship.

As to whether we dodged the harder topics, the course that we designed was based on topics that were generated by the focus groups and did include personally sensitive issues

such as relationships, health, death and dying, money, and legal matters (which necessarily address issues of capacity and death, by talking about LPAs and wills). The only one of those more sensitive topics that was not appreciated by the group was the session on death and dying, and that was partly down to how that session was designed and led. A course of this kind must be something that potential participants want to engage with in the first instance. A programme of sessions that was designed around very challenging material would have been much less likely to attract participants nor would it have created the open and supportive group dynamic that made the deeper personal sharing possible.

A different note of self-critical reflection is to wonder whether the original statement that started this enquiry, “the church is not doing enough for older people”, was really addressed to me albeit in a (slightly) indirect way. Was it really, “you (as vicar) are not doing enough for (us) older people”? That is a harder question to answer in a simple, undefended, non-self-justifying way. In all honesty, I do know that there are times when I could have done more for older members of the church, and there are people that I have not visited or made sure that others looked after their pastoral care. The sheer variety and level of demands on me in pastoral ministry, as for most parish priests, is difficult to manage and there are inevitably times when I have been over-stretched. It is immensely hard to prioritize limited resources of time and energy between urgent and important, individual and institutional, ministry to those within the church and missional activity amongst those outside the church. My interpretation of the question was that whilst it could be applied to me personally, whatever I did in response would not have much impact due to my limited capacity. What has been developed through this research is an approach that has the potential for far wider impact. The project has shown the benefits of prioritising community

development over relief of pastoral need. To extend this will require further work to: build capacity through training others; engage people in groups rather than in one-to-one pastoral care; develop processes that will be self-sustaining and have the potential to cascade.

Engaging my time and attention into this professional research has the potential for far greater leverage than trying to increase the number of people I visit on a monthly basis.

Part 3

CHAPTER 9.

CRITICAL 'CONVERSATION'

In this chapter I discuss further the research findings and draw out implications. This is an overall review of the research project bringing themes of older age, ministry and action research into conversation. In terms of AR methodology this chapter represents the evaluation stage of the spiral before the process continues into a new cycle. This part of an AR project is one of rethinking, reflecting, discussing, re-planning and capturing learning and understanding; it is about reflection orientated towards future action.

Overall review of the research project

The aim of this research project was to explore how the perceptions of older people in an Anglican Parish Church might be more adequately understood and addressed through an Action Research strategy. More specifically, this was not just any Parish Church but the one where I am the vicar and the people are those amongst whom I exercise my ministry. I was setting out to research my own professional practice and, which is more complicated, the people in my care.

As previously described, the project arose out of the perceived need that we were not doing enough for older people and that we did not know what action was required to address that deficit. It was discerned that this was a genuine issue, a real-world problem

that was worthy of investing time and energy into addressing; something which, as a church, we decided corporately to explore seriously.

The research project that grew out of that commitment was more than a congregational study. My intention and hope was always that it should be an opportunity for personal, professional and corporate learning, out of which could come practical theological wisdom that would be worthy of sharing. The intentions and potential benefits made the project suitable for executing within the structure of a professional doctorate programme; this brought access to university resources such as a library, training in necessary research skills, the benefits of collegial learning, and the accountability structure of supervision. The project did not have to be done through a DPT but the opportunity of doing so has brought a synergy that generated mutual benefits for myself and the parish. A key benefit has been that the Action Research strategy that we adopted has created a process through which the project has developed and been implemented. This has not been a neat sequence of discrete steps, but a sometimes messy, iterative, dynamic process that is characteristic of AR.

In my personal journal (2011) I noted a phrase that I heard on a retreat: 'energy follows attention'. The original context of those words is not relevant to this discussion, but they became important to me as a way of articulating how the research project was helping me in ministry. The research itself and the professional doctorate programme have been for me a means to focus my attention on this area of need and interest. As a consequence of this process of attending, energy has been generated and channelled into this local church's work with older people. Leach (2006) has identified paying attention as a key aspect of

practical theological reflection, to which I turn below. Here, I see the broader organizational effect of designating a particular area of work as a priority. There is a cost to this both personally and in terms of resource; there are times when it has been hard work and when I have given up focus on other areas of my life and professional work. Perhaps the costliness of attending to something or someone is reflected in the usual terminology of *paying* attention. Perhaps it is right to recognize the cost of a research project like this as an investment for the organization and for the participants. Through this project, peoples' time, effort, ideas and creativity were channelled towards the identified task; energy follows attention.

Theme 1: Older Age

In reflecting on this research project as a whole, a key question is to what extent I have reached a more adequate understanding of the needs of older people in this place? The main answer is that the project has led me away from the language of needs so that my understanding of the needs of older people and what might constitute an apt pastoral response has been reframed. This reframing is what I will explore most fully in this chapter. However, before that it is worth drawing out some of the insights that I feel we have learned with regard to the needs and perceptions of older people.

As explored in the previous chapter, the Ageing Well course generated some understanding of what helps people in this stage of life: a strengths-based approach; raising awareness of issues with provision of resources; a focus on well-being; prevention of

problems; and the promotion of positive practice. We identified certain, rather ordinary, factors that together helped people to find well-being in later life, including: keeping active; taking risks; being responsible for oneself – resources to make that possible; sense of purpose; basic health; good nutrition; being part of a supportive community / having a network of friends and family; finding life worthwhile; being valued as having someone with something to offer / give. These are needs that have been identified, explored and are now more adequately understood as a result of this research process. Not all of these are needs that the local church is capable of meeting, for example, keeping active, basic health and good nutrition – nor should it set out to provide directly and comprehensively for them. However, other issues are much closer to the core of what participation in the life of a local church might provide: the issues of sense of purpose, belonging to a supportive community or friendship network, having a life that feels worthwhile and where a person is valued for who they are and seen as having something to offer. The key challenge this raises is how to enable people to participate in the life of the church community so that they can access these benefits.

The needs of people who are frail and dependent relate primarily to health and social care, and they rely on local statutory services, private provision, and family support to meet these needs. In our context, the church does not have the capacity to offer this kind of provision. Often members of the church who become housebound and who are no longer able to participate actively in the life of the church through attendance are kept in touch with through individual friendship and the ministry of the clergy or pastoral care team. This could be more effectively structured and, indeed, we are now seeking ways of developing

pastoral structures to maintain these contacts better. This will be one local future action that arises directly from this project.

The move away from meeting needs has been a key area of learning in relation to my professional pastoral practice, and it is to this area that I turn to in the next section as I reflect on the theme of ministry.

Theme 2: Ministry

From relief to development

The greatest challenge to my professional practice, and one of the deepest area of personal learning throughout this research project, has been a move from seeing the pastoral role as being primarily about meeting needs to seeing the key task as being the creation of community. The role of the church in creating community and the part it can play in the corporate dimension of human wholeness is a key theme in the work of Lambourne (1987): the local church through its liturgy, fellowship, outreach, and the social role that comes from its rootedness and presence in its locality, is generative of community and through that is a source of healing.

This represents a mindset shift from relief to development. Much pastoral work is, of necessity, focused on individuals and the reason for the encounter is often one of need, for example, if someone has a problem to discuss, is dealing with difficult feelings or a painful experience, or is requesting one of the occasional offices. In most cases there is something

to be done which might be about listening carefully and offering a response. My motivation at this point of pastoral encounter is to be helpful and in cases of pain to attempt to bring relief; in many cases this is adequate, the need is met and people are satisfied. However, there are several limitations and disadvantages to this: limited capacity; fostering dependence; and loss of opportunity.

In the role of vicar I am the lead pastor for the congregation and for any residents in the parish who look to their local church for support in this way. I am not the only minister, there are: other ordained clergy (some retired); licensed lay ministers; a pastoral care team; and informal arrangements between friends and neighbours. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which I have primary responsibility for pastoral care and that I am perceived as the primary focus for carrying out pastoral work. However, there is a limit to what any one person can do and so the first problem is one of capacity: there are only so many pastoral relationships that any one person can maintain; time and energy are limited. In a pastoral-mode church such as this the church tends to reach a certain size (up to a 150 adults) beyond which it cannot grow because of these capacity issues. When the pastoral work is shared more widely then there is a greater capacity and potential for the church community to be numerically larger. The leadership role for the minister tends to move away from direct pastoral care and towards co-ordination and oversight (Mann, 2001).

Nurturing, helping, pastoral relationships have the potential to create dependence. The risk is that the person receiving care loses their agency and becomes dependent on the helper to bring relief and provide solutions. As noted above, a person being able to take responsibility for themselves can contribute to well-being; dependency diminishes this

capacity and consequently reduces well-being. There is a related issue in this situation for the caregiver who can become stuck in the helping role and, as a result, be less able to focus on other issues including their own priorities.

The opportunity that comes with pastoral situations is the creation of relationship and the introduction of a person into a wider network within which they can receive support, but also find resources and in time contribute to others. The development of the capacity within the community to provide supportive networks of relationship, and the way of working with a person to help them draw on their own resources and find their own solutions are both longer term responses. This developmental way of working is more intensive but can lead to better long-term solutions. The short-term, palliative response, which brings relief but not development, may need to be repeated and is not likely to lead to an increase in well-being for the person seeking help.

This shift in mindset and approach has required of me a certain amount of unlearning as well as re-orientation. Engaging with this project as a researching professional has enabled me to identify this as an area for professional development and has given me an engaged experience of practising the skills involved. I would say that I am still at the beginning stages of this learning. It is a good illustration of praxis which has to be developed contextually and *in situ*. One of the challenges of this is that I am enmeshed in the present situation with a set of established practices, commitments and expectations. In terms of established pastoral practices, I am still committed to the practice of visiting housebound members of the church and, in particular, giving Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament. Other wider practices include: the church offering public worship in accessible

ways and at appropriate times; helping people prepare for the end of their lives whether through opportunity for reflection and life-review, meeting to plan funerals, or administering the last rites. Part of the learning about transition to the new mindset has been to find ways to dedicate time to developmental tasks and to delegate established pastoral work to other members of the ministry team. These are some of the implications for parish ministry in its organizational aspect.

Defining the role of the pastor as being 'the shepherd of the church system' and not just to individuals was proposed by Mansell Pattison (1977, pp. 48-56), but has been neglected in more recent discussions in favour of more managerial concepts of leadership. Mansell Pattison recognizes the role of the leader as 'the most critical variable for system function' (1977, p. 62); which, within the overall system of the church is, 'an active unique contribution, the contribution of one living member in a dynamic and integrated living system' (p. 63) and that 'the pastor does not operate from outside the system' (p. 64). According to Mansell Pattison, as part of and from within the whole church system, the pastor exercises seven leadership functions: symbolizing; being; sharing; intentionality; modelling and risk-taking; limit-setting; and the catalytic and enabling function (pp. 63-69). Through exercising these functions the pastor enables the system to be 'healthy, growing and full of love'; the system 'then becomes the vehicle for health and growth of its individual members' (p. 69).

Myself in ministry

Near the beginning of the DPT programme (2010) I reflected on my role and professional context using the image of spinning plates: at that time, I had several key roles and responsibilities and moved between them keeping each one going but having to focus on one at a time. Through the research process I noted at various moments in my journal the feeling of having too many different things running simultaneously and the research being one more commitment among them. My different professional roles have made competing claims upon my time and attention. At its best the research project helped sustain my professional work by creating insight, giving space for reflection and keeping things in proportion. At its worst it was either a burden or just frustrating to be squeezing in time for study and at times there was an unsatisfactory lack of progress. My reflection is that this is the reality of being a researching professional; it has to happen in the midst of one's work or it would not be engaged scholarship or grounded in practice.

Throughout the time of my participation in the DPT programme my professional role has developed and I have adapted to different demands; certain commitments have been completed, I have handed over some roles and also had to take on some different responsibilities. It would not be relevant to mention all of these developments, but one recent reflection has been an important piece of learning for me. From 2005-2014 I was leading a building project for the church and the community centre; half a million pounds was raised and essential repair and improvement works were carried out. Reflecting on this building work and my role within the process and comparing it to my role in community and capacity building, I realized that all that work was done without me doing any building work

myself. This now seems obvious but, the point is that within that process I had to lead the fundraising, facilitate collective decision making, sometimes make executive decisions, liaise with the surveyor and some of the contractors, oversee the legalities and ensure all the appropriate authorization for work was received. I might say that I made sure the building work was done but I did not do the building work.

The contrast with the research project is that I have had to be a lead researcher and, whilst I have worked collaboratively, I have had to carry out actions myself. However, as we seek to continue to develop our work with older people, my role may well become more like it was with the building project. In seeking to build the capacity of local older people and other church members to work together on this, my role will be one of leading, enabling, facilitating, decision making and oversight. Part of my mindset shift is away from seeing myself as, or feeling that I ought to be, the sole or lead pastor.

Theme 3: Action Research and Asset Based Community Development

Action Research is sometimes referred to as a methodology but I prefer to see it as a strategy for carrying out research; a way of organizing and structuring the research process. It does bring with it certain values and commitments, and it has a particular understanding of epistemology. However, AR is very open to employing a range of methodological tools which are drawn on as each situation requires. The methodology employed in the first stage of the research was one of focus groups and the later stage involved delivering the Ageing Well course, reflection on that experience and more specifically the coding of transcribed

structured group conversations. What AR brought to the project was a way of conceptualising and structuring the different stages of the tasks of research. There were times for reconnaissance, for planning, for action and for review and evaluation. It was helpful to have the framework of AR in mind as we moved through these stages.

However, these stages were not always distinct and the movement was not always forward; there were times when it was one step forward, two steps back. But what the research process did create was that 'theoretical space' (see p. 56-7 above: Brown and Jones, 2001, p. 101); a space for reflectivity and for stepping out of the reactivity that characterises much pastoral parish ministry. My own observation of the church as an institution, of colleagues, and of my own practice is that plans for new actions are not necessarily based on research or arise out of sustained reflection, but rather are reactions to a whatever new is going on and/or are implemented without thorough preparation as to what is really needed. One of the strengths of being guided by the AR strategy was that it gave an intentionality to the research actions which meant that they arose out of the lived situation of the people in this place. That is not to say that every ministerial or pastoral task is one that can or should be designed new every time, nor does it have to be proved to be effective by reference to an evidence base. What was very good about the experience of leading this programme was the sense that this was something well designed and planned and that contributed to local knowledge based practice (Glasby and Beresford, 2006).

One of the challenges of carrying out AR in a church setting is that a Church of England parish church is not a closed system in the same way that a factory, classroom or hospital ward is. Bournville Parish Church, like many local churches, has porous boundaries: there is

a core membership and a wide fringe membership; there are widely varying patterns of attendance; there is a commitment to provide public worship open to all; and a calling to exercise the 'cure of souls' for the whole geographical area of the parish. What is more there is a wide diversity of people who participate in the life of the local church and they come for different reasons. Compare this to other settings where AR has been employed such as education where the usual setting is of one practitioner with a contained classroom and a fixed number of students to work with who are all of the same age and there for the same reason. In this setting the practitioner can be sure that the action they implement reaches all those it is intended to influence, and consistent contact makes an evaluation of impact much more achievable.

My reflection on this attempt to carry out AR in a church setting is that it was messier than it might have been in other contexts and it was hard to assess impact on the wider community of the local church. Given that this project was seeking to engage with older members of the church and community it obviously was not aiming by itself to transform the church as whole. There are, however, lessons to be learned from the process and findings that will inform future practice and that have the potential to bring about a change to church culture which could be more wide reaching than the relatively small group of hosts and participants. This has already been explored above in the section reflecting on the theme of ministry (pp. 169-174).

One intentional aspect of the design and delivery of the Ageing Well course was the fostering of community. Through the duration of the programme, we sought to build up a

good team of hosts and relationships of trust between participants. The external facilitator noted in his evaluation report (see Appendix No.11):

I hope it helps to demonstrate one way in which community and self-care can be intentionally seeded for older people. If so, it will also demonstrate how churches such as this St Francis Bournville can remain able to sustain society, even as we move into a new world characterised by an ageing population, in a society which less and less regards itself as Christian.

The idea of church living out its vocation to serve the people of its parish not by providing services but by seeding and nurturing community is one that has great possibilities and potential to change the culture of a whole church and the role of those who lead it.

This is the clearest point of connection with ABCD. In the planning stage of the AR process, as we began to discuss the possibility of developing and running a course based on the ideas generated by the focus groups, we started to draw on the ideas of ABCD. One of the members of the steering group had some experience of this approach and fed that in to our conversations. This again is a strength of PAR: it is able to respond to what is needed by the situation and draw upon the knowledge of the participants in the research process; it is not bound to follow one method all the way through but is able to adapt and respond.

ABCD influenced my thinking at this stage in the research and has developed my understanding of the way I work, which I anticipate will shape my future ministry. Part of ABCD is that it lives out an ethos of abundance rather than scarcity. It starts from the presupposition that there are enough resources already, that there is enough capacity within a community and that what is needed is to make connections to release that power:

Gifts, association, and hospitality create the conditions or rules for what we call the *capacities of a competent community*. Capacities reside in individuals and can be nurtured to exist in the collective. They are core elements that need to be visible and manifest to create an abundant community, and a family and neighborhood [*sic*] that function.

The capacities of an abundant community are kindness, generosity, cooperation, forgiveness, and the acceptance of fallibility and mystery. All come from within and are part of our nature. They are outside the market. (McKnight and Block, 2010, pp. 83-84)

Abundance became a theologically resonant theme which is reflected on further below.

A critical question in relation to AR is the extent to which the research findings are generalizable. The criterion of generalizability has been a key measure of validity in positivistic scientific research, yet the approach and outcomes of this project were highly contextual and there is no guarantee that the same process would work well in a different setting with different participants. There was certainly a confidence amongst the participants that what we had achieved had been good, that the process had worked well for us, and that we had found out some interesting and helpful things. That is what might be termed the internal credibility of the research. But we also felt that what we had done could be useful to others and might be worthwhile for others to undertake a similar process. Such external credibility would require others, who did not participate in this project, to believe in our results. The concept and process of the Ageing Well course has been shared with other groups working with older people as an example of practice but has not yet been run in other settings. What we have done does seem credible to others, on this limited experience, and it would be viable for someone else to use the same process in their situation. Only when that happens will we have a sense of the generalizability of the project. It would, in

my view, be possible to run the process and course in a different setting but the variety of participants and interactions would mean that it would be a different experience for those taking part and might well generate new and different results.

This is not a new issue in AR and is well addressed by Greenwood and Levin who propose what they term 'transcontextual credibility' as a way of resisting the pressure on social research to move towards the model of scientific objectivity. Their view is that a given situation contains more possibilities than can be actualised and, therefore, all situations are the product of historical interactions between people, their actions, their environment, and events that are taking place. From this perspective, theories are explanations of what has happened and can only serve to help envisage future scenarios but cannot predict or determine what will happen. Drawing on a study by Weber in 1958 they develop the notion that comparisons of similarities and differences between contexts enable the meanings created in one context to be assessed for their credibility in different situations. So AR does not 'generalize through abstraction', rather through reflection on the differences and similarities between contexts a judgement can be made about the 'possibility of applying knowledge from one situation in another' (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 69-70).

Herr and Anderson list a variety of terms that have been suggested as criteria for assessing AR: 'Quality, goodness, validity, trustworthiness, credibility and workability' (2005, p. 49). They go on tentatively to propose 'five validity criteria' linked to the goals of AR as owned by most of the various approaches: outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic. Reason and Bradbury's discussion of validity has some overlap with these five criteria, but with different emphasis. They have a more relational approach to AR and so

their criteria focus more on 'emergent, evolutionary and educational' ways of engaging with 'self, persons, and communities' (2001, p. 12). Their 'five questions for validity and quality' ask about: emergence and enduring consequence; significance; plural ways of knowing; outcome and practice; and relational practice. The point is that the learning from AR can be valid in terms of the actions carried out, the personal and organisational learning that comes out of the research, the changes that are implemented through the research and the long term impact on individuals and communities. The transferability, generalizability, and replicability of research are not the determining factors in assessing AR as valid. This will always be an issue in the study of practices, as Collins has persuasively shown, since the tacit knowledge and actions involved are 'polymorphic' and 'socially embedded', and therefore, in my view, cannot simply be reduced, abstracted or reproduced in a different social setting (Collins, 2000).

Drawing on these validity criteria it is possible to evaluate this AR project as a whole; including the reconnaissance stage, the focus groups and the design and implementation of the Ageing Well course. The project has made a contribution to conceptual knowledge in terms of the findings about what helps people to age well in this context; and it has also developed my and the host team's knowledge in action (our tacit knowledge) especially in relation to facilitating these groups. The research process has been innovative and has tested out the implementation of AR in a previously little-explored field of practice. There has been personal, professional and institutional learning both in relation to individuals' daily living, ministerial practice and our critical consciousness about issues to do with ageing. The characteristic of participation was fully realised with a high level of democratic involvement and a great deal of attention paid to relational practice. Certainly the short-

term impact of the course on participants was assessed as very positive, and I believe there will be some enduring consequence through repetition of the course and the production of resource materials to enable others to adapt and run the course in their own settings. This evaluation against the validity criteria of Herr and Anderson, and Reason and Bradury suggest that it is reasonable to claim that this project has been a rigorous piece of PAR.

A pertinent critical evaluation of AR is that it can easily become purely pragmatic at the expense of values and meaning (Cameron *et al.*, 2010). There were times in this project, and in particular whilst in the midst of the Ageing Well course, when I wondered if we, too, had slipped into pragmatism and had lost sight of the theological aspects. The claim of Cameron *et al.* for their proposed Theological Action Research (TAR), which was discussed more fully above (pp. 63-64), is that it is 'theological all the way through' (2010, p. 51). This ensures that issues of value and meaning are kept in focus alongside the development of plans for practical action. It would be right to acknowledge that this project was not explicitly theological all the way through. But interestingly, on further examination of TAR it becomes clear that it is theological-all-the-way-through by including implicit theological commitments and theology embedded in practices. This does not seem that different from PT's attention to theology in practice and its long-standing claim that human lived experience is a theological resource. Whilst it is a worthwhile proposal it is clear that TAR is as much a development of PTR as it is a new model.

This project was an application of a PAR process in a church setting. It was, in its own way, theological all the way through in that it has a strong theological motivation and value base and was fully embedded in the life of the church and its members' daily living. I would,

further, want to suggest that the theology in this kind of project makes a distinct contribution to the different stages but is also, in some sense, integrative of the whole. The core theological commitment in this work is the Christian vision towards human flourishing and well-being (Pattison and Edgar, 2016a, 2016b) – life in all its fullness (see Appendix 13) – and it is to this that we now turn.

Practical Theological Reflection

Christian Theological Anthropology: Is ageing a creation good?¹⁰

Christian anthropology has been described as ‘expansive, untidy and constantly shifting’ (Dyson, 1983, p. 23). To summarise a contested field for the purposes of this discussion, it can be said that human nature is created, relational, natural, moral, and fulfilled in God.

In the Genesis 1 creation narrative God makes human beings in his own image: ‘male and female he created them’. The Trinitarian God made human beings to exist as persons in relationship (Zizoulas, 1985, pp. 27-65), and they received the original blessing to be creative and fruitful and were given responsibility over creation (Genesis 1.26-27). As the narrative unfolds humans are shown to be capable of moral action, which is tragically shown in the human ability to act in ways against God’s will in favour of self-will. However, in Christ’s

¹⁰ These theological reflections were first explored in a series of sermons which I preached during Lent 2015. I am grateful for the comments and reflections shared in discussion afterwards. That sermon series was one of the ways in which I attempted to share some insights from the research with members of the church.

incarnation God's creative Word becomes fully human and assumes all of human nature that it may be healed.¹¹ Jesus Christ, the Son of God born of Mary, lives a fully human life in a particular time, place and culture, and grows and develops to become an adult who is able to be obedient to the will of God the Father. Although Jesus did not himself live into old age his fully human body did grow and develop to maturity and would have been ageing. The growth, development and ageing aspects of human nature are, along with all other aspects of humanness, assumed and healed in Christ.

Some human attributes and practices are theologically understood as part of the created order or as creation goods: marriage, procreation, and Sabbath rest. However, human ageing is not usually included in those categories. The first humans, Adam and Eve, are created fully formed adults: Adam formed from the earth and animated by divine breath and Eve formed from his rib, such that she is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2-3). But the blessing to be fruitful and multiply means that childbirth and subsequent development into maturity is part of the created order. The human capacity to grow, develop, learn, become and, in turn, nurture others are important dimensions of a Christian anthropology. The blessing for fruitfulness and the capacity to grow to maturity suggest that becoming and fulfilment are central to human flourishing.

The concept of fullness is one that is also found in the biblical language of ageing, where an older person may be described as being 'ripe and full of years'. In the Old

¹¹ From Gregory of Nazianzen on Apollinarianism: 'For what has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved... Let him not grudge us our total salvation, or endue the Saviour only with the bones and nerves and mere appearance (zographia) of humanity.' Letter 101 quoted in McGrath (1995, p. 142).

Testament key figures such as Abraham (Genesis 25.8), Gideon (Judges 8.33) and David (1 Chronicles 29.28) are all said to live to a good or ripe old age. Moses (Deuteronomy 34.7) and Caleb (Joshua 14.10-11) are both vigorous into their old age. Fruitfulness in old age is a theme for Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18,1-15; 21.1-7), and Hannah and Elkanah (1 Samuel 1.1-20) which resonates into the New Testament with Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1.6-7).

A key text for Christian reflection on fullness of life are the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (10:10): 'I came that you may have life and have it abundantly' (John 10.10 NRSV); also translated 'life in all its fullness' (e.g. GNT). Jesus is the bringer and giver of the abundant life of the new age of the Kingdom, sent by God the Father to bring about the well-being of humanity. Jesus through his own fullness of life makes it possible for others to live the same fullness.¹²

One possible way of developing the theme of fullness might be the well-known saying of the early second century Church Father, Irenaeus, often translated as: 'the glory of God is a human being fully alive'. However, further reflection on this text in its context suggests that the fullness of life that Irenaeus had in mind is not about human self-fulfilment. A fuller quotation is as follows:

For the glory of God is a living human being; and the life of the human consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God. (*Against Heresies* 4.20.7)¹³

¹² See Appendix 13 for an exegetical commentary on this verse.

¹³ Latin: *Gloria Dei est vivens homo*; literal translation: 'the glory of God is a living man.'; *Vita hominis visio Dei*: 'the life of a man is the vision of God.'

From slightly earlier in the same work Irenaeus also says: 'For the glory of the human being is God...' (3.20.2). The aliveness that Irenaeus speaks of is the life of divine grace; fulfilment is sharing in the resurrection life in Christ.

A theme from Pauline theology provides a helpful expansion of this idea.¹⁴ In 1 Corinthians 15, through the analogy of a seed, Paul sets up a series of contrasts between the pre- and post-resurrection body, including the phrase 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable' (v.42b). Here the Greek word *phthora* ('perishable') does not denote a state but rather a process of increasing weakness and decreasing capacity. By contrast *aphtharsia* ('imperishable') denotes the opposite which is the reversal of decay, a process of increasing vitality (Thiselton, 2006, pp. 281-2). The power of the resurrection life is working within our bodies even as they experience the physical process of ageing and dying. So it is not by our own energy and effort that we come to fullness of life, but rather through sharing in the risen life of the one who became full human. In terms of Christian theological anthropology, it is part of the created order that we are born, develop, and grow to maturity, and our full flourishing comes from our participation in the life of the God who not only creates, but redeems and sustains all life.

From the standpoint of Christian faith, the idea of 'ageing well' should include the commitment to participation in the life of God. This means living faithfully as a disciple of Christ, which includes, as a far as possible, participation in the life of the ecclesial community. It is possible to grow old in Christ and whilst the practices of discipleship may not change with age, it may be that the context of ageing may shift the focus of attention

¹⁴ This draws on material first submitted in my literature review in Part 1 of the DPT programme.

more on to certain practices. The Ageing Well course was focused on human fulfilment, but it did so in a way that did not give attention to the practices of Christian faith or to the idea of life in Christ.

Has, then, this project been too pragmatic, too much orientated towards problem solving or inclusive engagement with the wider community? If the purpose of the project had been evangelization, catechesis, nurture in the life of prayer, or instruction in Christian doctrine, then the answer would have to be 'yes'. However, none of those were the intention of the project, which was, rather, to develop a grounded and contextual understanding of the perceptions and needs of older people living in this place. That engagement has led us to explore the idea of flourishing and fulfilment in later life. Life in all its fullness is much more than good nutrition, exercise, health, financial management, and having in place all the arrangements for one's will and lasting power of attorney; but it is not less than those. The concept of fulfilment is holistic in its reach. One of the challenges for the local church now is to build on the approach, the resources and the relationships to explore further how people's engagement with issues of faithful discipleship can be fostered.

Practical Theology and Pragmatism

AR is rooted in pragmatism's 'theory of inquiry' in which the researcher seeks to acquire knowledge in response to a real-life need (Dewey, 1982). In the sense that I have employed an AR approach in this project it did begin with a seeking to respond to a

perceived need. In AR the researcher seeks to find appropriate ways to act in response to need; AR investigates reality in order to transform it and, equally, AR also transforms reality in order to investigate it (Kemmis, 2008, p. 132). However, as Swinton and Mowat have observed, in terms of PT:

action is not merely pragmatic or problem-solving, although it may contain elements of this. For the practical-theological action always has the goal of interacting with situations and challenging practices in order that individuals and communities may be enabled to remain faithful to God and to participate fully in God's continuing mission to the world. (2016, p. 263)

The starting point was seeking to respond to perceived needs and a pragmatically rooted action inquiry has helped to understand some of those needs better. The transformative aspect of the research process and findings has been to lead me away from the focus on needs to a broader attention to the development of community. Enabling participation in the reflective community of the Ageing Well course was something potentially far more helpful than an attempt to meet the needs (understood in terms of deficit) of older members of the community. In the process I have been challenged to adopt new approaches and learn new practices. I have also been brought back to reflect more deeply on the understanding of God's action in the world and my role in enabling that to be discerned and participated in.

Part 4

CHAPTER 10.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

By engaging in Participative Action Research, in the context of a local Anglican parish church, this research project has attempted more adequately to understand and address the perceptions and needs of older people in this church and wider community. This has been an exercise in Practical Theology and has been conducted within the framework of a professional doctorate through the University of Birmingham. This conclusion critically reflects on the process by reviewing the aims and limitations of the project before presenting the main conclusions in terms of the contribution to knowledge made by the action research, and finally suggests areas for future development and further research.

Review of Aims

This research project, in its various stages, has enabled members of a local Anglican church to develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing older people in this context. This was achieved by developing and implementing some specific actions that directly addressed these issues. The participants as well as the researcher were enabled to learn through reflection on these actions.

The research has had a positive impact on the lives of the older members of the church and community through their participation in the focus groups and especially through

participation in the Ageing Well course. Through personal conversations and public communication awareness has been raised about the needs and, more importantly, strengths and gifts of older people. By adopting a research strategy based on building relationships it has been possible to grow mutual understanding amongst members of the congregation. Members of the church have been directly involved both as participants and in developing the project and planning further stages.

The research has generated insights into ageing and into AR in church contexts that contribute to scholarship, knowledge, and professional practice. The design and development of the Ageing Well course as a shared resource will enable others to replicate this process and explore these themes further for themselves in their own contexts.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this project. It had to be carried out within the framework of the DPT course programme which imposed certain time constraints especially in the earlier stages of the project.

One of the ways in which the research might have been carried out differently is with more extensive focus groups at the early stage of the project. What was done was sufficient, especially within an AR process where the generation of insight comes from the action stage. It is possible that a wider range of focus groups might have led to a different emphasis and therefore the design of a different response. A different way of proceeding at that stage of the research might have been to employ the model of an extended conference for the whole

congregation or wider community over the course of a weekend, for example. That may have enabled a wider engagement and greater momentum at that earlier stage of the process and would be worth considering as an alternative. Such a conference model does require more organizational input than a series of focus groups, which felt more manageable. Small focus groups are, arguably, a more appropriate way to enable the participation of older people in a research process.

Had time and opportunity allowed, it would have been beneficial to have tried running the Ageing Well course in a different setting. Potentially that would have provided interesting comparative data and wider contextual reflection. However, there was not time within the constraints of this project to repeat the in-depth level of analysis. An area for development of the project, on which work has already begun, is to produce the course materials and a description of the process to enable others to run the programme in their own settings. There have already been several expressions of interest in this and it is hoped this will become one way in which the findings of this research have a wider impact and help develop improved practice in the field.

Another limitation is that more attention could have been given to following up the course participants to assess long-term impact. At the outset, it was hoped to involve the participants in other activities or groups but lack of capacity at the time within this organisation did not allow for that.

The most critical limitation of this project, which must be acknowledged, is the lack of impact for those who might be termed 'hard to reach'. Participation in a course process may be beyond the capacity of some people who are then excluded from accessing the benefits

of the learning community. Having identified the needs of loneliness and isolation, running a course is not sufficient. This is a valid critique which I accept. The counterpoint is that this approach, and the underpinning ethos, seeks to work preventatively to reduce isolation in the future and to build capacity in the present so that there is greater local resource to connect with those who are at present beyond the reach of an organisation with limited resources.

Contribution to Knowledge

The research question has been answered by bringing older people together in community to explore and reflect on their experience of growing older and their identity as older people. This is a process answer to what has been shown to be a needs based-question; the process of the research, the *action* of the action research, revealed the prejudice of the needs based approach. The outcome of the research is in many ways a challenge to society's dominant deficit-based conception of what it means to grow old. There are distinctive but not determining things about growing older. The research has demonstrated the importance of not seeing ageing in terms of deficit.

This research project contributes to knowledge in three ways. The first contribution extends the PT thinking about older age through having investigated the actual needs of those who are old. This is a previously under-researched area of PT. The second contribution concerns the theory and practice of PT research. The lived experience of ageing has been investigated through a PAR process involving focus groups and the content of the

Ageing Well course that the research team designed and implemented. The research process explored the use of PAR as a tool for PT. Critical evaluation has reviewed the way AR has been adopted or adapted by other practical theologians or employed in church settings. More importantly, the project has tested PAR through complex and extended research into professional practice. The third contribution is to the understanding of the pastoral practice of Church of England parish ministry and the role of clergy within that context. Woven throughout these three areas of contribution is a theological discussion arising from the practical engagement with the issue of ageing, with the research process and the practice of ministry.

There have been many observations and reflections recorded throughout this dissertation. There are eight main conclusions which relate to the theological discussion and three areas of contribution to knowledge. These are listed below and expanded in the rest of this conclusion.

Summary of Main Conclusions

1. The research has been theologically generative proposing a theological anthropology of ageing.
2. The research has extended PT thinking about old age by normalizing ageing.
3. The research has extended PT thinking about old age by coming to an understanding of the actual needs of older people in one local church setting.

4. The research has shown how an ethic of abundance can be employed to challenge a deficit models of ageing.
5. The research has demonstrated how the social assets of the local church community and older people themselves can be a resource to empower older people.
6. Seeding community is a valuable professional practice for parish ministry which requires a mindset shift in the practitioner.
7. Participative Action Research has been shown to be a valid tool for PT for researching 'with', developing contextual action and creating theoretical space.
8. The design of an effective course in terms of content and process has had a beneficial impact for participants in the research, the local church community and for other settings who might employ the course.

1. A Theological Anthropology of Ageing

Human beings age. The given-ness of ageing comes from being creatures that exist in time. We are mortals, who within our span of life are born and nurtured, grow to maturity in relationship with others, reproduce and nurture our young, live socially and communally with intergenerational relationships that are mutually enriching. A direct account of ageing is largely absent from theological anthropology and yet it is part of our human nature: unless they die earlier in life as a result of illness, disease, deprivation, accident or violence, all humans will live into old age. To accept this allows for the possibility that ageing is a creation good and an essential part of how human life unfolds. The blessing of Creation by the Creator is one for fruitfulness, flourishing and fulfilment. The fruits of human

reproduction are vulnerable, dependent young who require lengthy nurture from an extended social network of caring adults. The maintenance of healthy networks of relationships amongst people is itself something that requires care and nurture. Many people find their fulfilment through creative and caring roles not just of parenting but of building community, producing goods and sustaining culture. All this takes place within time and is dependent on the passing on of acquired skill and inherited knowledge; such wisdom is the gift of years.

2. Normalizing Ageing

A key finding to emerge from this research was the fundamental understanding that to age and grow old is normal; it is not a catastrophe or crisis. It is not only the ordinary experience of most people, especially in our present context, but a long life is the desire of most people which cannot happen without ageing. One of the interpretations of our key action, the Ageing Well course, was that the effect of the group process was to normalize ageing and to provide a resource to help people engage with the normal experience of ageing. Ageing is often perceived and portrayed in negative terms and as a problem for society. The approach of the course and its process and content helped to counter such perceptions. Behind the development of the Ageing Well course was the ethic of abundance, seeing older people as an asset and resource. This ethic connects with the theology of ageing as a creation good and the vocation to be fruitful.

The conclusion that older people face the same issues as others captures a lot of what the course revealed. It is not so much that older people have needs but that wider society has a problem with older people. The experience of ageing and growing old reveals the negative attitudes of society – not just to ageing but to illness and death, even to community life and public faith as well. The course revealed the problem in our public discourse about old age which does not include it as normal. It would seem that there are features of life that society cannot talk about but which people in community can.

3. Understanding Needs

The Ageing Well course generated contextual understanding of what helps people in this stage of life: a strengths-based approach; raising awareness of issues with provision of resources; a focus on well-being; prevention of problems; and the promotion of positive practice. Several, rather ordinary, factors were identified that together helped people to find well-being in later life, these included: keeping active; taking risks; being responsible for oneself and resources to make that possible; sense of purpose; basic health; good nutrition; being part of a supportive community, such as having a network of friends and family; finding life worthwhile; being valued as having someone with something to offer or give. These are needs that have been identified, explored and are now more adequately understood because of this research process. Not all of these are needs that the local church is capable of meeting – for example, keeping active, basic health and good nutrition – nor should it set out to provide directly and comprehensively for them. However, other issues are much closer to the core of what participation in the life of a local church might

provide: sense of purpose and having a life that feels worthwhile, belonging to a supportive community and friendship network where a person is valued for who they are and seen as having something to offer. The key challenge this raises is how to enable hard-to-reach people, especially those who are already isolated, to participate in the life of the church community so that they can access these benefits.

4. Challenging a Deficit Model of Ageing – the Ethic of Abundance

Ageist deficit models of ageing mean that older age can bestow a sense of identity such that people see themselves negatively. The Ageing Well course attempted to counter that with a strengths-based approach, valuing and affirming people's experience and encouraging them to make a positive contribution through sharing that wisdom born of experience. Amongst the assets that the course valued were the strength and depth of relationships already existing amongst participants. The church community offers not only a source of relationship but a resource for exploring themes of meaning and purpose in life.

5. The Church as part of the Asset Base for Community Development

The church, amongst other things, is a place where the relationships between members and their relationships with people in the wider community can interconnect. These relationships were one of the assets that the research focussed on and attempted to build upon. The way in which the research group and the course worked, especially in terms

of the formation and development of community, is, in itself, a major finding of the project showing that this is an area worthy of greater investment and further research. This parish church, as many others do, gives a context in which relationships can be fostered as community is built up and where there is potential for intergenerational relationships outside the family to be made. Values and practices of parish churches such as sense of belonging, offering hospitality, an ethos of positivity, sense of purpose and a commitment to discipleship all contribute to the richness.

The hosts in the research team lived out Christian practices such as offering hospitality, befriending, and showing care and compassion to others. This points to the formation of Christian community as being about more than words and demonstrates the importance of learning such practices over time within the community of the church. What is more, those embodied values can be put into practice at the edges of the church community and not just with those whom are already part of it. Churches may confidently seek to promote life in all its fullness for the people in their care both in terms of seeking to nourish the life of all, and enabling faithful discipleship of life in Christ for all who find meaning and purpose in following him.

6. The Professional Practice of Parish Ministry – Mindset Shift towards Seeding Community

My own professional practice of pastoral ministry has been challenged and re-orientated through this research. The shift in mindset that is required is to move away from

needs based responses towards building of community through asset-based development. The leadership role of the local minister has a distinctive contribution to make in terms of shaping the ethos of positivity, in modelling welcome, also in supporting new initiatives that seek to further the mission and ministry of the church.

7. Participative Action Research

A key dimension of this research has been to assess how AR might provide an appropriate strategy for generating understanding and practical action in an Anglican parish setting. PAR was adopted in preference to other types of AR. This strategy creates a structure of participation which has ethical benefits by ensuring that it is not just one privileged person in the organisation (i.e. the vicar) imposing their agenda. It also has research benefits in enabling a broader range of perspectives and engagement.

PAR provided a practical framework for organising the research ensuring that time was allocated to reconnaissance, planning, reflection, action, interpretation and communicating. Importantly it gave priority to action and the implementation of new practice. PAR supports the disciplines of reflection, learning, recording and reporting that are part of other research processes, and strengthens the commitment to action by it being integral to the epistemology.

PAR was an apt way to approach the issue that this project addressed. Having discerned that this situation required something new, it had to be approached through research rather than reflection. PAR enabled the project to be conducted in a way that was

both careful and rigorous; it provided a good framework for ethical and sensitive research of a vulnerable group of people and ensured the in-depth generation and analysis of data. Had the same situation been addressed in a more rapid way there would have been higher ethical risks and less depth of learning. The theoretical space made possible by the PAR process allowed for the generation of emergent theory from the phenomenological raw data gathered from observations and reflections on the action.

PAR has been shown to be a useful and appropriate tool that practical theologians might draw upon amongst other methods and strategies. Rather than seeing PT as a form of AR, this project modelled a way of doing PT through AR. This research project employed a straight-forward AR strategy. Nevertheless, it is PT because it arose from the practical concerns of members of the local ecclesial community, motivated by Christian faith, with the intention of serving the well-being of our neighbours, and through prayerful and theological reflection has generated new insights into God's providence and saving action in the world.

8. The Ageing Well Course

An output from the research process was the Ageing Well course which was designed and led by the older members of the local church. The course was a research tool that generated data and understanding; in terms of the PAR, the *action* of the course created a theoretical space for the hosts as researchers to reflect on experience and generate insights. The Ageing Well course also represents a contribution to knowledge-based practice through showing a way of practising pastoral care with older adults. The course was rated highly by

the participants who reported being very happy with the content and process. A key focus for participants' learning was about being positive and people reported feeling more confident and motivated to do certain things. A positive impact of the course was an increased level of understanding about the topics discussed; the passing on of information; and in helping people feel more positive about the process and experience of ageing.

Impact, Development and Further Research

The future development and long-term impact of the research lie partly in embracing a new mindset of community development rather than provision of service. This will require continuing learning for myself as a pastoral practitioner, especially further reflection on the concept of being the pastor to the church system. For members of the church community the shift is one of expectations placed in the lead pastor but also in the role they play in contributing to the ministry of the whole church. The approach and epistemology of PAR suggest that this shift will be learned by putting the changes into practise. It follows that the focus of future pastoral work will lie in: building capacity in relation to equipping people to facilitate groups; giving attention to the practices that build community; further sharing of pastoral care with other ministers and members of the church; further work to embed the ethos of abundance and engagement with issues from a strengths-based perspective; further reflection on how to communicate and foster practices that welcome and value people especially those whom the wider culture sees in terms of deficit.

The value found in the process of developing and implementation of the Ageing Well course suggests that greater investment and further research into the area of community formation and development would be worthwhile. The research drew attention to the importance of listening to the normal experience of ageing which is a previously under-researched area and further work could be profitably done to deepen and extend what has been proposed here.

The production of a resource booklet containing the course materials and a description of the process will enable others to run the programme in their own settings. One of the impacts of this research will be the learning that takes place in other similar settings. The publishing of the Ageing Well materials and these research findings will help to share the benefits of this project, not only, in terms of what has been discovered, but how it has been discovered.

Conclusion

This research project was an interdisciplinary, interpretation and critical reflection on lived experience leading to renewed practice. Through interdisciplinary engagement with the fields of gerontology, PT, AR and ABCD, this project has generated new insights and understandings into the lived experience of older people in a local church community. Interpretative and critical reflection on the shared experience of ageing revealed and generated ideas about how a local church might appropriately respond to older people. The project pointed to the capacity of local church members to form a learning community

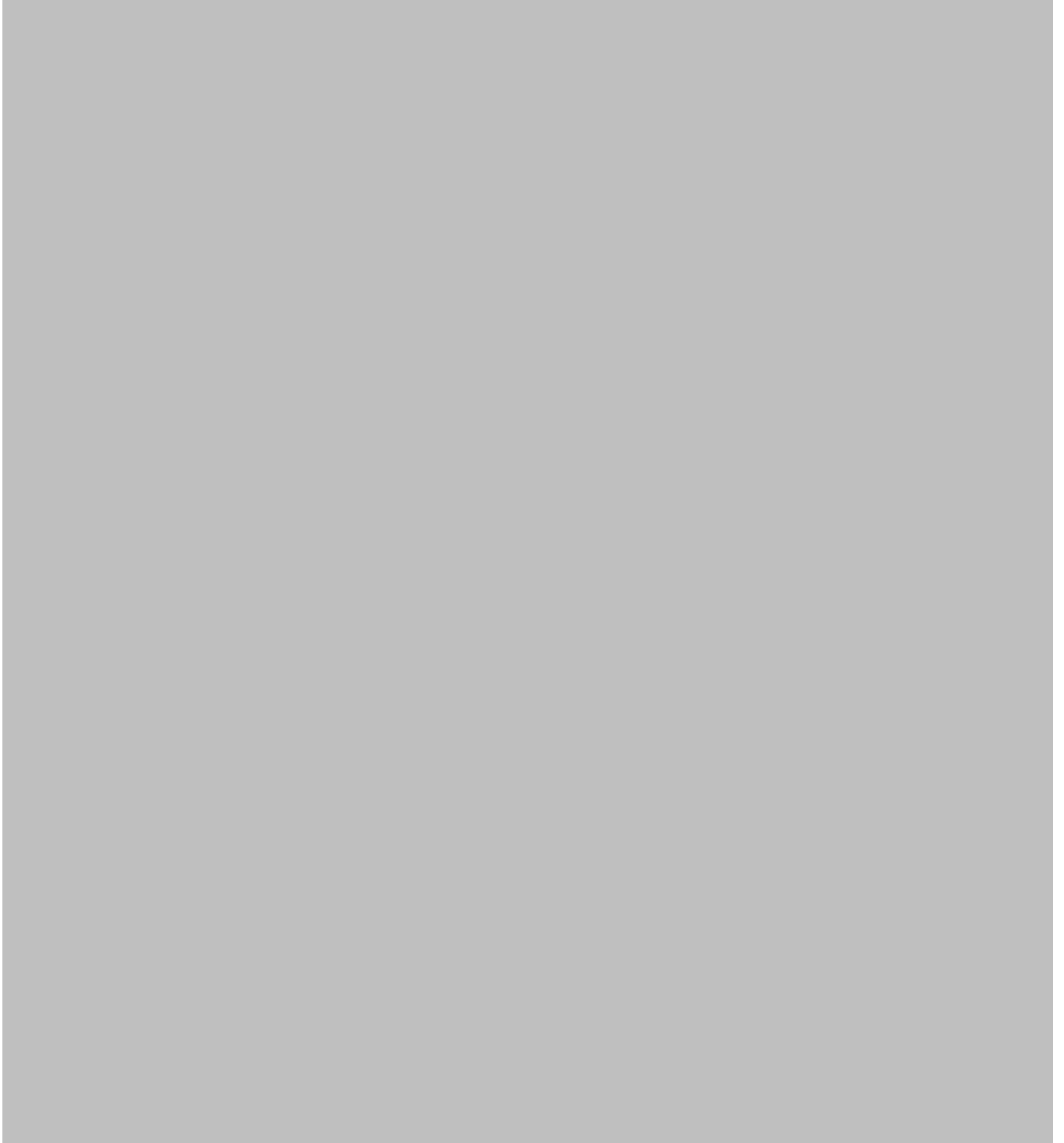
building on the existing assets of their practical wisdom and their already existing relationships of trust. The experience of growing old is different and distinctive from earlier stages of life but it is not discontinuous – there is much that is the same. People of all ages live well in meaningful communities. The action of designing and running the Ageing Well Course provided a good illustration of the benefits of community formation in practise. It also revealed that the church, itself, is such a community where people, in their diverse ways, may grow to maturity in love.

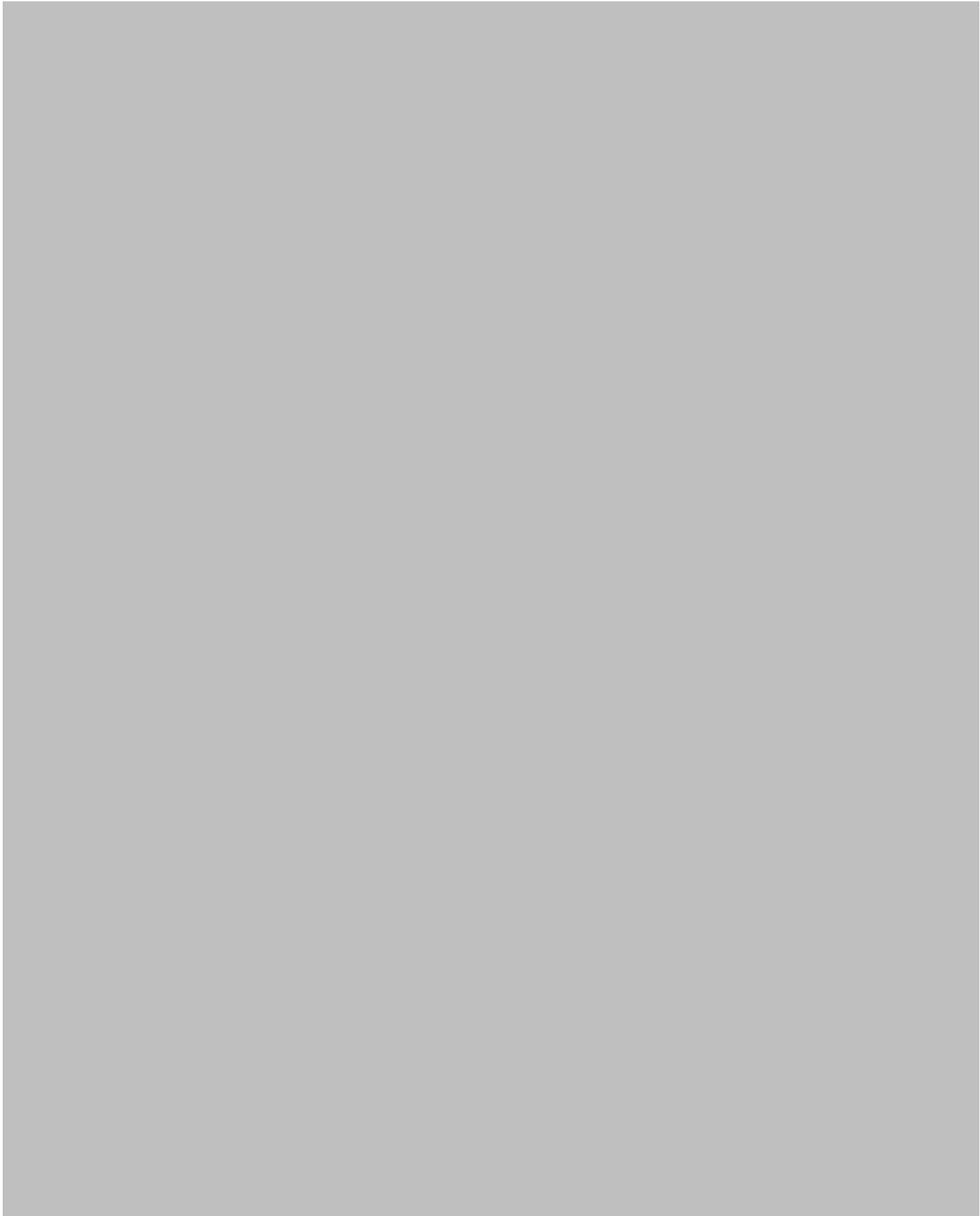
Appendices

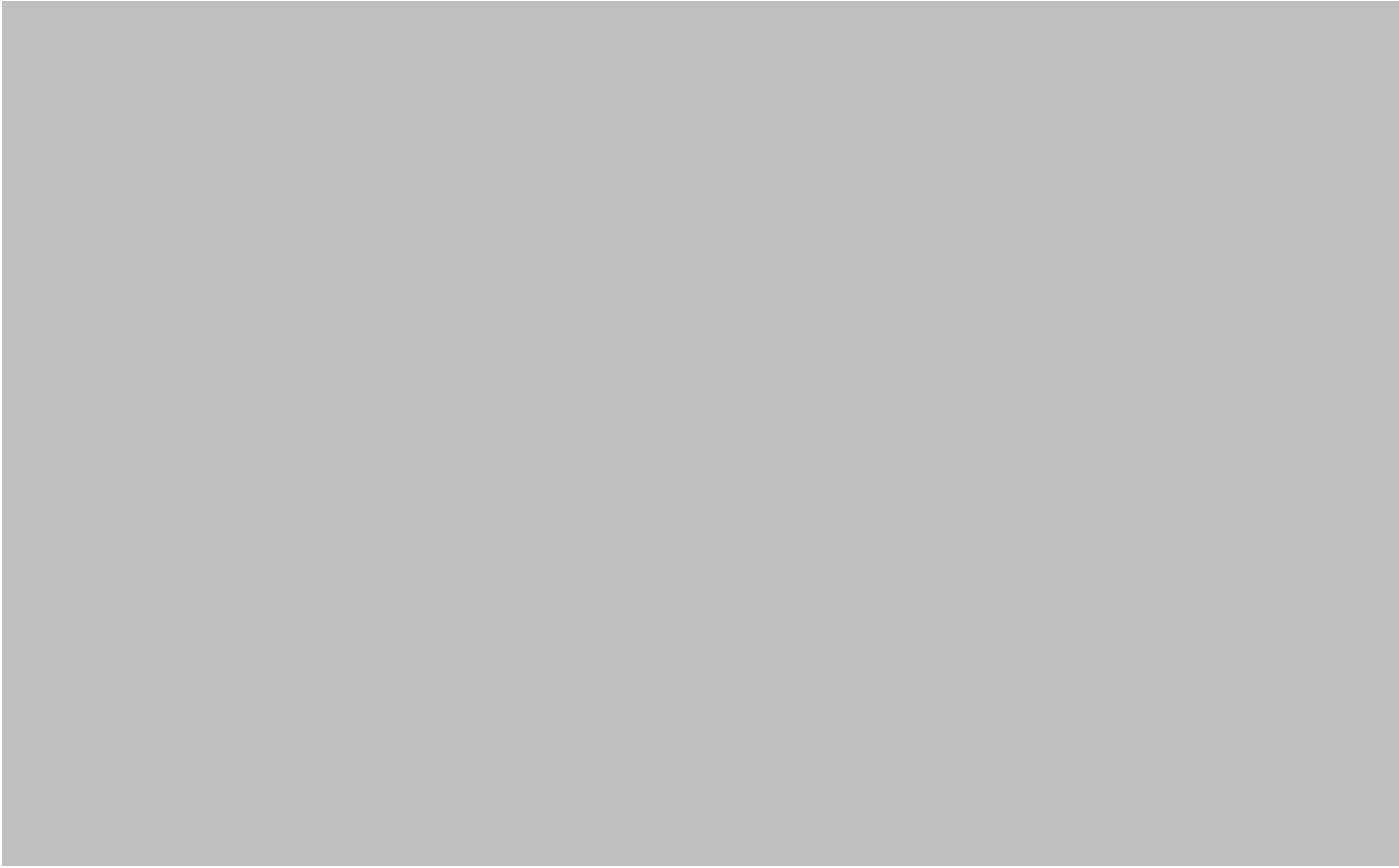
Contents:

1. Ethical Review Application and Approval
2. Example of letter to participant with consent form
3. Collated results from Initial Four Focus Groups
4. Poster inviting people to offer to be Hosts for the Ageing Well Course
5. Poster for Ageing Well Course
6. Description of Ageing Well Course Process and Content
7. Sample Session Plans for the Ageing Well Course in Action
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10. Collated Group Reflections from the Ageing Well Course
11. Facilitator's Report
12. Word Frequency Query
13. Exegesis of John 10:10

Appendix 1
Application for Ethical Review



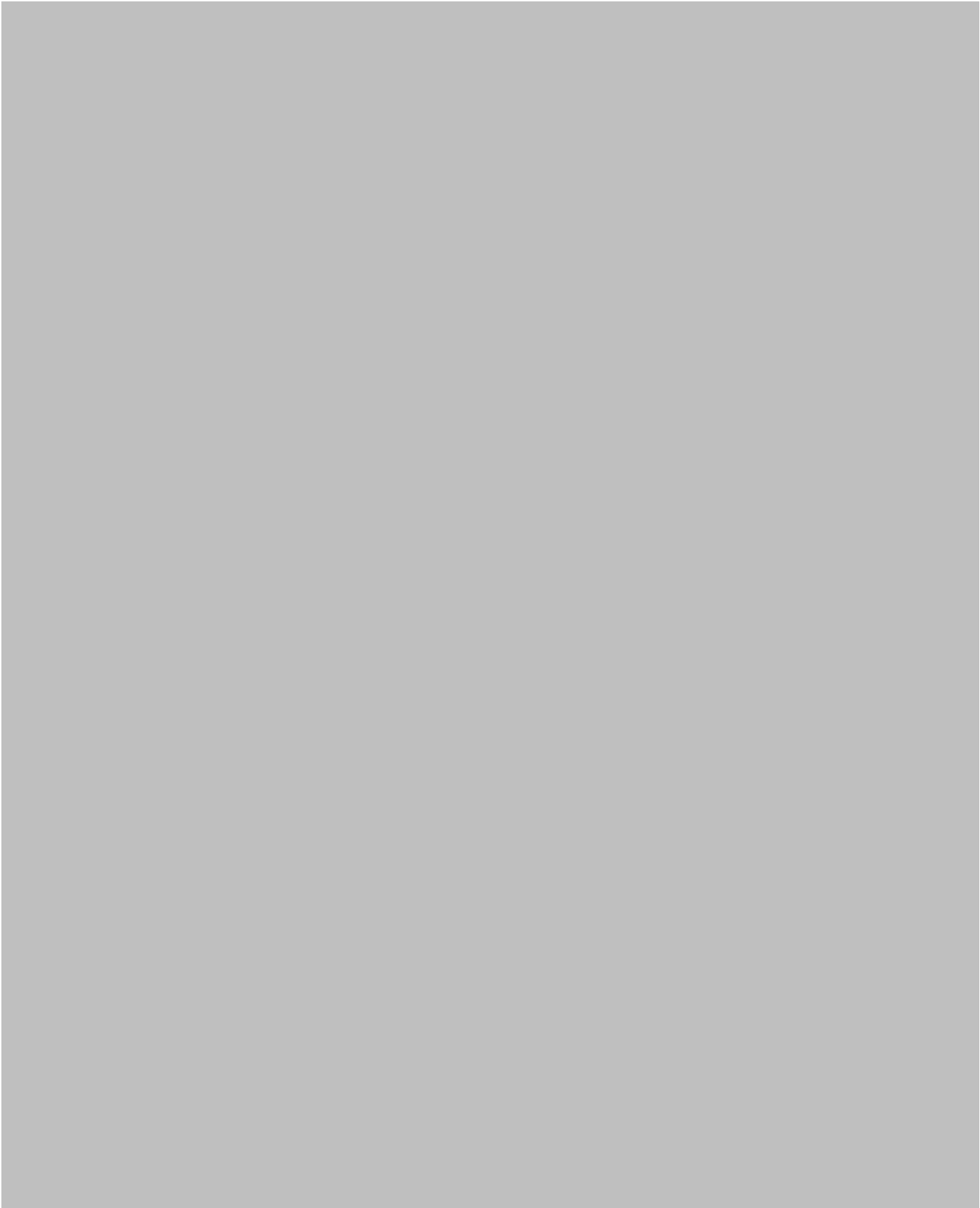




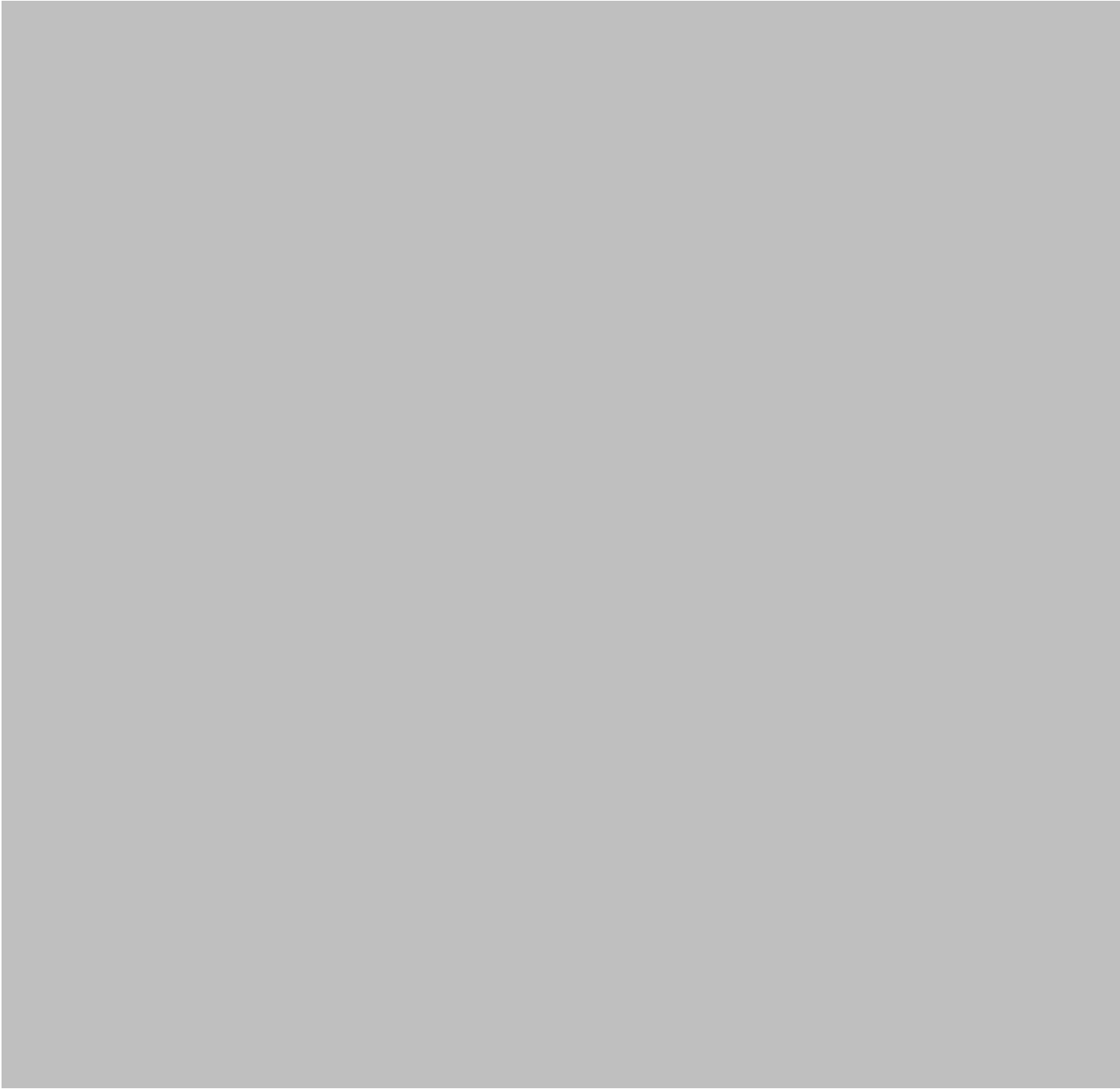








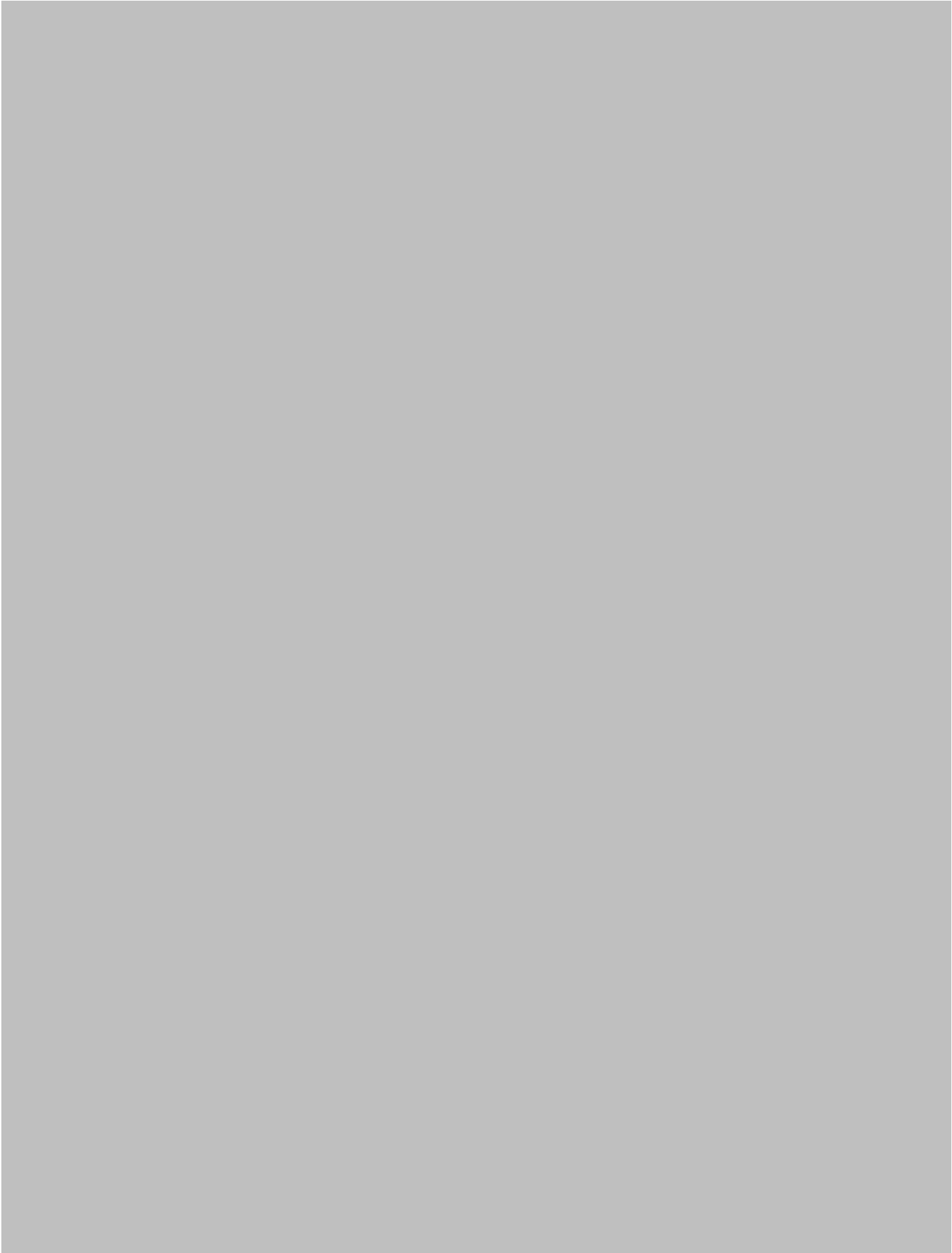












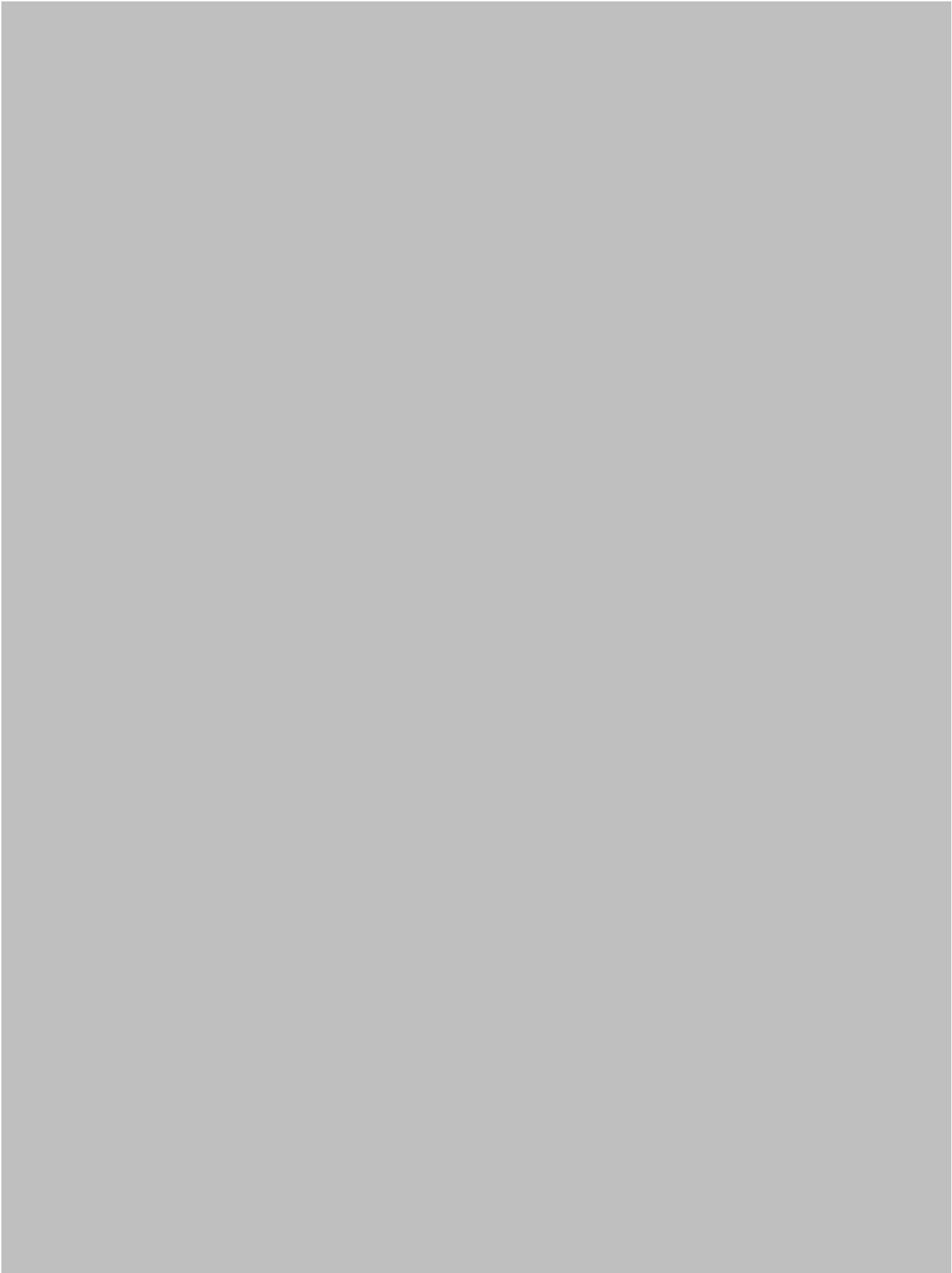




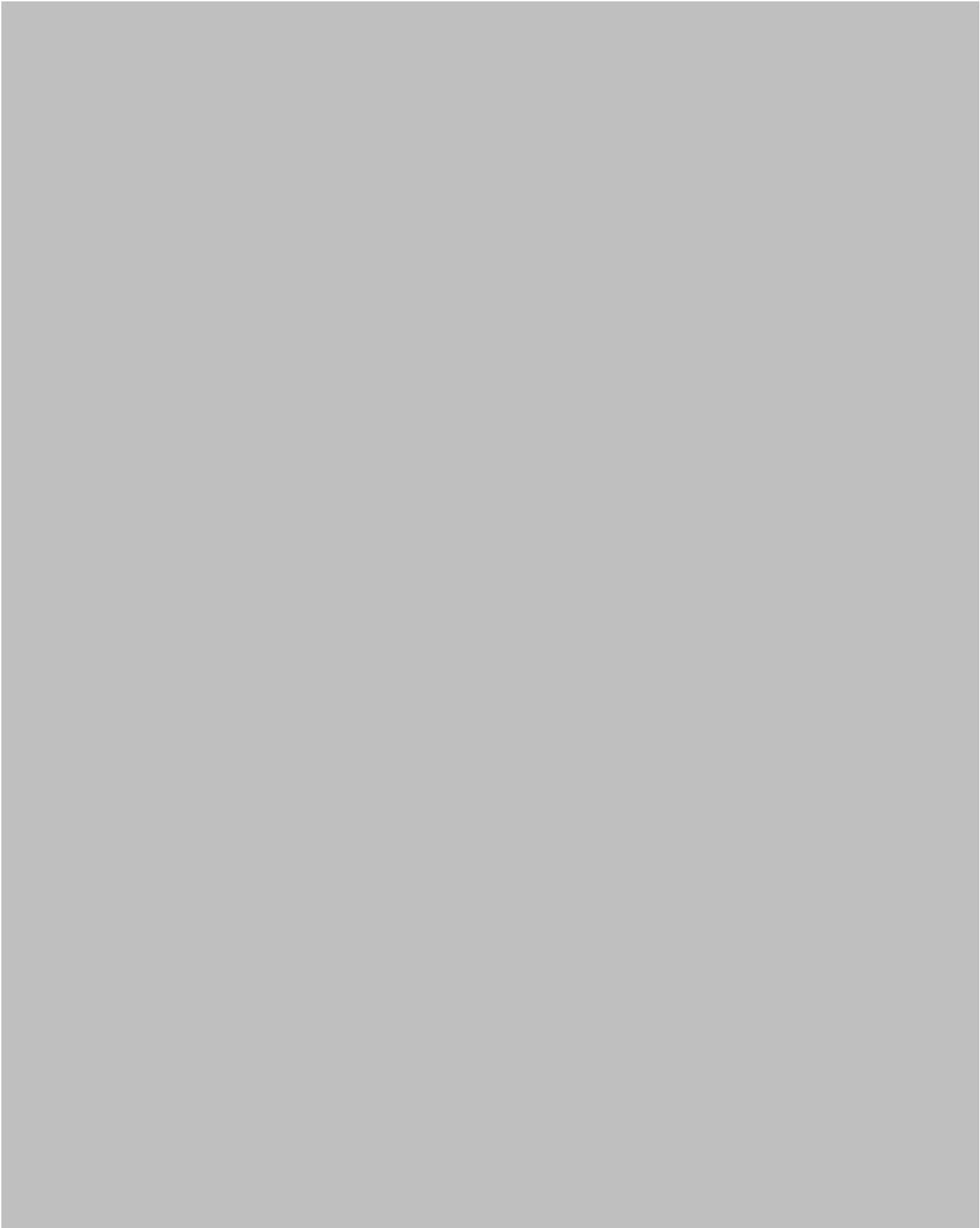


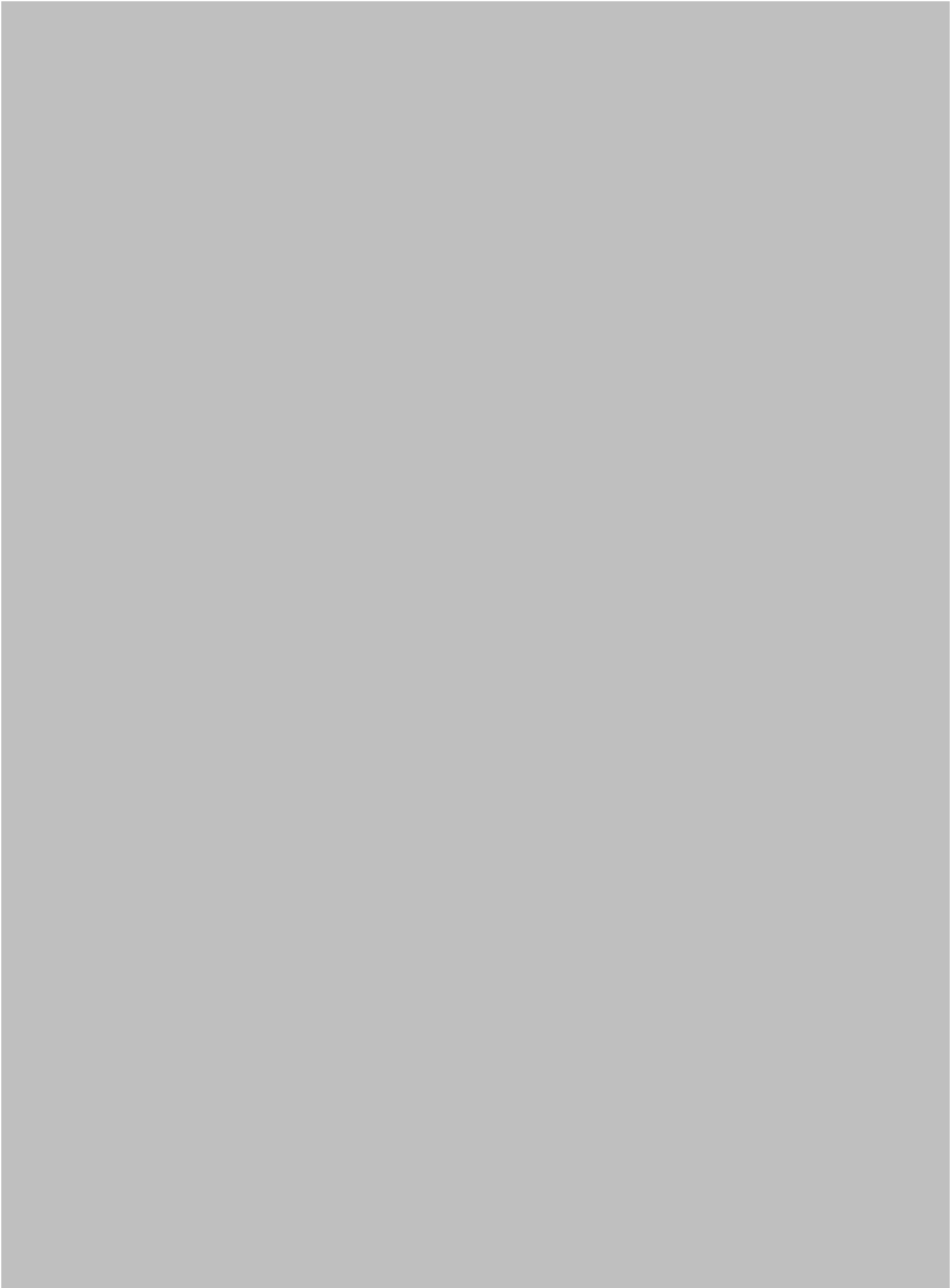


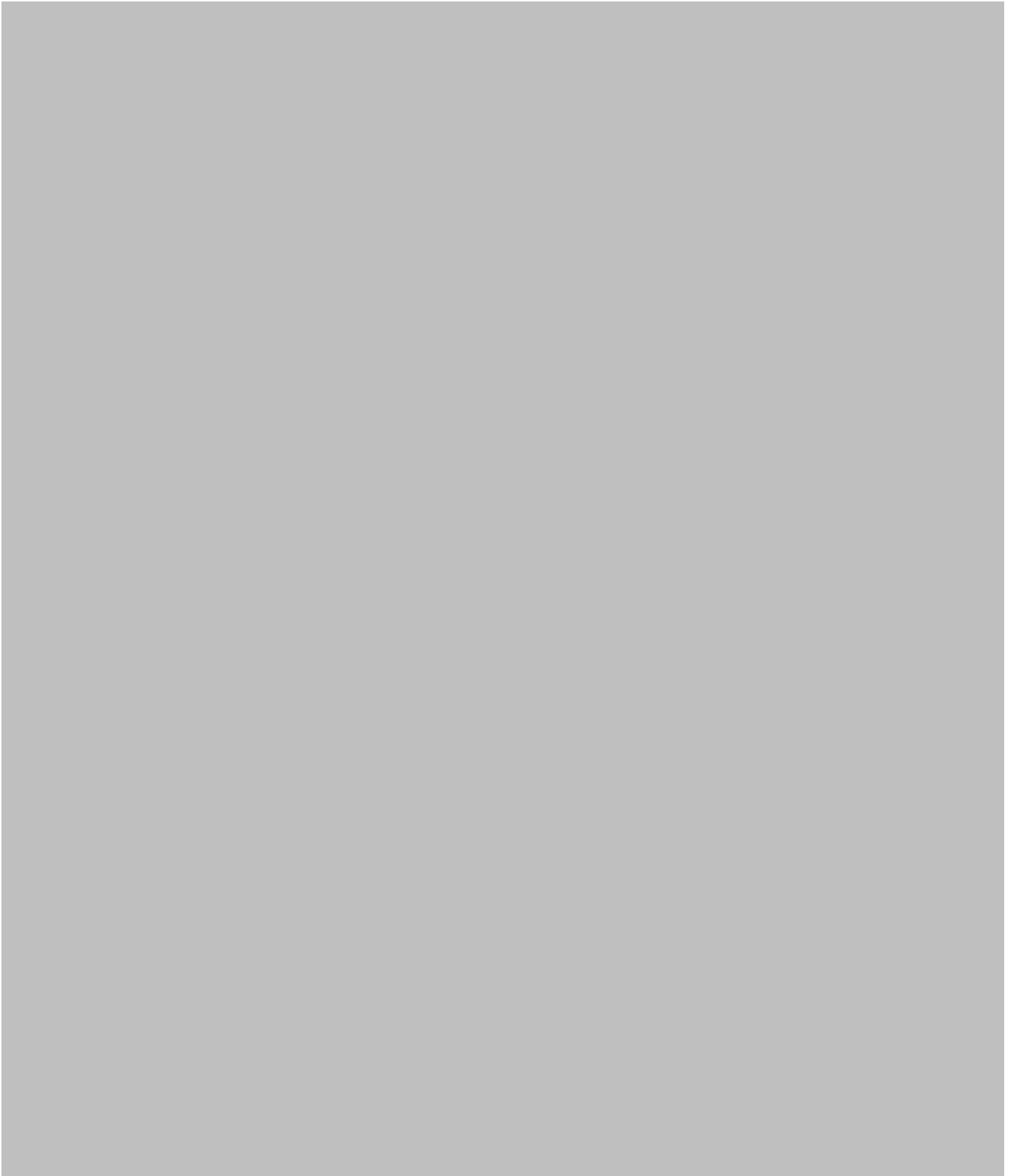






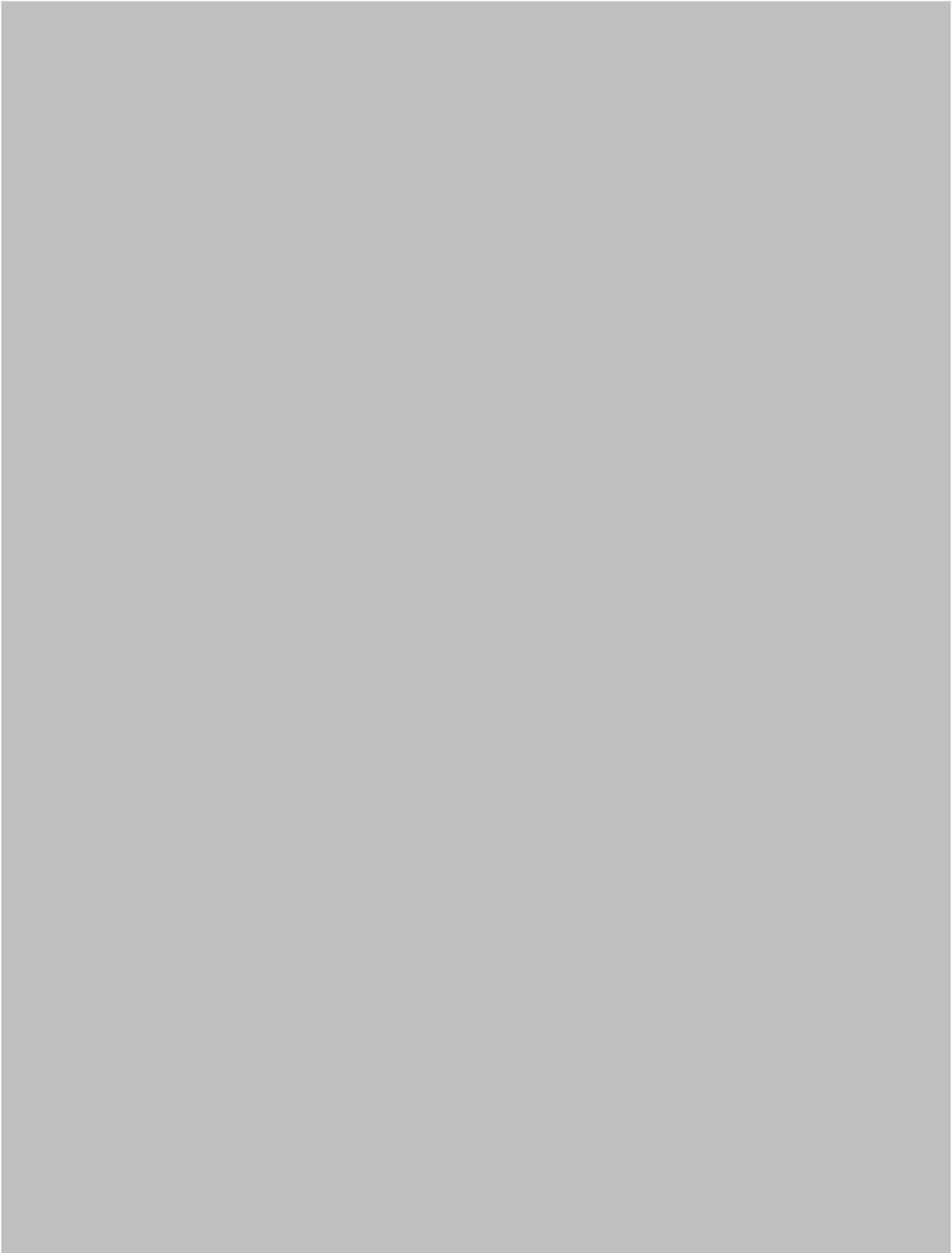


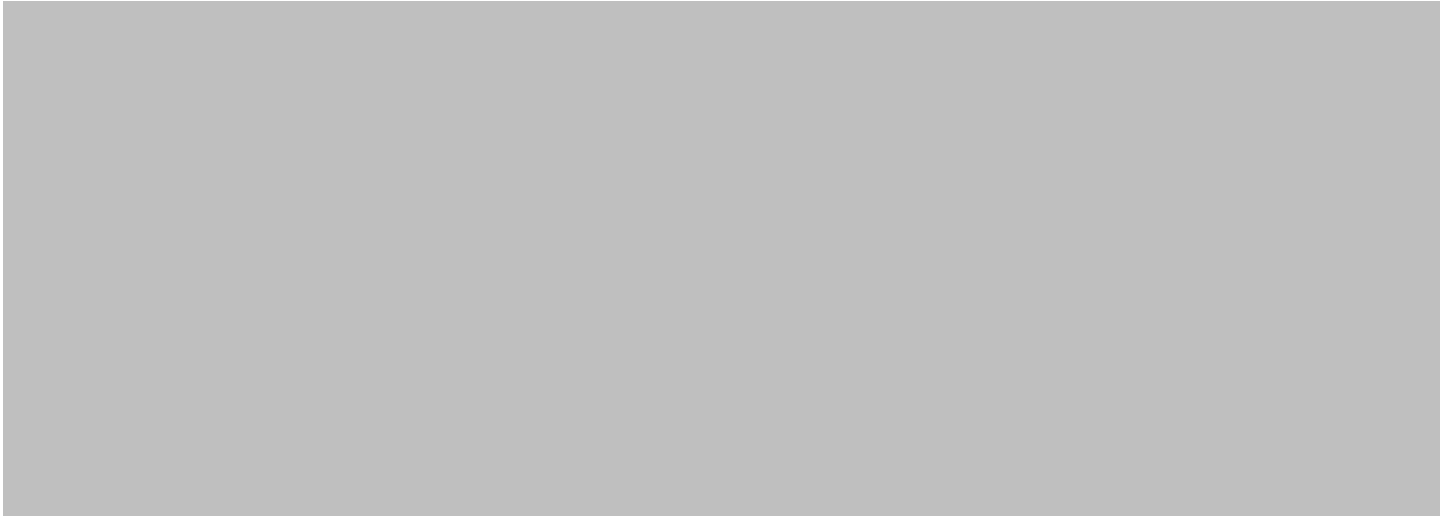


























Appendix 2. Examples of Sample Letters and Consent Forms

Sample Letter to Participant [to be printed on headed note paper]

[Insert Date]

Dear Member of St Francis Church,

Congregational Survey: Getting to Know Ourselves Better

As a member of St Francis Church, I would like to invite you to join in with a research project we are running.

The overall aim of the project is to explore how the perceptions and needs of older people in our community might be more adequately understood and addressed. The next step in this project is to find out more about the people who come to St Francis Church. We are interested in people of all-ages but for the purpose of this part of the research we are consulting with people over 18.

We would like you to take part in a short interview (about 30 minutes) with another member of the church during which you will complete a survey form. We are trying to get an overview of the members of our church, how they spend their time and what their interests and skills are.

This research project has the support of the PCC and The Revd Peter Babington (The Vicar) is involved. The overall results of the survey will be shared anonymously with the whole congregation; the information you contribute will not be linked publicly with your name.

Please find on the reverse of this letter further information about this research project. Also enclosed with this letter is a further sheet of paper. This is a reply slip which is also a consent form which you will need to fill in if you wish to take part in the interview.

Please complete the reply sheet and return it to the parish office marked for my attention, alternatively you can give it to me in church. A member of the church will then make contact with you to arrange a time to conduct the interview.

Yours sincerely,

Donald Spencer

On behalf of the Steering Group

Information Sheet: Developing our work with older people in the Bournville Community

The idea behind this project is to explore how we can develop our work with older people through a particular process known as an Action Research Strategy. The important thing about this approach is that is participative and intended to lead to doing things better. People taking part in the project will be reflecting on what is already happening in our community (including the church and community centre) and trying to understand the needs of older people better. Then we will try to improve how we respond to those needs by changing what and how we do things. We will then study the effects of the changes and if possible repeat the process. The whole research project will run until the end of 2014.

The first stage in the research process was to conduct a series of focus groups. This has happened and the groups identified these two main issues:

1. People want to be involved and contribute to the life of their church and community.
2. We identified as a priority the need to build up community and belonging so as to help prevent isolation and loneliness.

We are now in the second stage of the project which is to explore ways in which we can develop our community and our communal life as a church. We want to do this by building on the strengths and assets that are already present in the community and congregation. In order to do this we need more information about what people see as their strengths and to find out how they would like to contribute.

Your participation in this project requires your consent. If you are interested in being part of this project then please complete the enclosed form and return it to Donald Spencer.

Consent Form
Developing Work with Older People Research Project
Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

In any research there are certain necessary requirements that have to be followed and which you have to be aware of before you give your consent. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with any other parties (members of the steering group, the Vicar, St Francis Church or Birmingham University).

The main reasons we are doing this research are:

- to improve the care we offer to the older members of our church older people in the wider community.
- to learn more about how Christian faith and practice helps people in their personal development throughout their lives and to find out how we can work more closely with other community organisations.

We would also like you to be aware that:

- The Vicar, The Revd Peter Babington, will be writing up the research as part of some study he is doing for his own professional development through Birmingham University towards the qualification of Doctor of Practical Theology.
- Data will be collected by completing survey forms. These completed forms will be kept securely and not shown to any third parties.
- There are very low risks, if any, associated with this study. Some people may experience mild embarrassment in discussing personal circumstances, but we wish to assure you that you will not have to disclose anything you do not wish to. Information you give will be treated in confidence by the person conducting the interview and the members of the steering group who will be discussing the findings.
- You will be asked to give your name on the survey. This is because part of the purpose is to find out what skills people have to offer and how they might like to contribute to the life of our church and community. We do therefore need names and contact information in order for follow up to be possible. However, your name will not be associated with research findings in any way.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature of the project and its procedures.

Print Name

Preferred means of Contact: (e.g. telephone or email)

.....

Signature of Participant

Date

Sample Letter to Participant [to be printed on headed note paper]

[Insert Date]

Dear [name],

Developing our work with older people in the Bournville Community

As a member of St Francis Church, I would like to invite you to join in with a research project we are running to explore how the perceptions and needs of older people in our community might be more adequately understood and addressed. We would like you take part in two focus group meetings to share your own experiences and reflect on the needs of other people known to you. Through the first set of focus groups we will seek to build up a wide picture of the needs of older members of our church and community. In the second focus group (to be held in the Autumn) we will share with you the findings so far and seek to identify some practical actions that respond to those needs.

This research project has the support of the PCC and The Revd Peter Babington (The Vicar) will be involved in the focus groups.

Please find on the reverse of this letter further information about this research project. Also enclosed with this letter is a further double sided sheet of paper. One side is a reply slip giving a choice of four dates for the focus groups. The other side is a consent form which you will need to fill in if you wish to take part in the project.

Please complete the reply sheet and return it to the parish office marked for my attention, alternatively you can give it to me in church.

Yours sincerely,

Donald Spencer

On behalf of the Steering Group

Information Sheet: Developing our work with older people in the Bournville Community

The idea behind this project is to explore how we can develop our work with older people through a particular process known as an Action Research Strategy. The important thing about this approach is that it is participative and intended to lead to doing things better. People taking part in the project will be reflecting on what is already happening in our community (including the church and community centre) and trying to understand the needs of older people better. Then we will try to improve how we respond to those needs by changing what and how we do things. We will then study the effects of the changes and if possible repeat the process. The whole research project will run until the end of 2014.

The first stage in the research process is to conduct a series of focus groups. The purpose of these groups is to enable us to hear first-hand what people think and understand about the perceptions and needs of older people in the wider community and in particular relation to faith and the life of the church. The group sessions will also play a part in shaping the first action taken to improve what we do. At this stage in the research project we would like everyone to attend a second meeting in the early autumn to reflect on the information collected so far and to agree possible further actions.

During this focus group, data will be collected by audio recording the conversation and by the researcher and possibly an assistant taking some notes.

The expected benefits associated with your participation are that you will be able to listen to other people share their experiences, and hear how they relate their life experiences to the life of the church. It is hoped that your participation in this conversation will be an encouragement to you, and one that deepens your own faith and understanding.

Your participation in this project requires your consent. If you are interested in being part of this project then please complete the enclosed form and return it to Donald Spencer.

Consent Form

Developing Work with Older People Research Project

Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

In any research there are certain necessary requirements that have to be followed and which you have to be aware of before you give your consent. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with any other parties (members of the steering group, the Vicar, St Francis Church or Birmingham University).

The main reasons we are doing this research are:

- to improve the care we offer to the older members of our church older people in the wider community.
- to learn more about how Christian faith and practice helps people in their personal development throughout their lives and to find out how we can work more closely with other community organisations.

We would also like you to be aware that:

- The Vicar, The Revd Peter Babington, will be writing up the research as part of some study he is doing for his own professional development through Birmingham University towards the qualification of Doctor of Practical Theology.
- During the focus groups, data will be collected by audio recording the conversation and by the researcher and possibly an assistant taking some notes.
- There are very low risks, if any, associated with this study. Some people may experience mild embarrassment in discussing personal circumstances related to ageing, but we wish to assure you that you will not have to disclose anything you do not wish to and that the groups will be confidential.
- Your name will not be associated with research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant in this focus group will be known only to your fellow participants on the day and the person leading the focus group.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature of the project and its procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Print Name

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Information

Developing Work with Older People Research Project

Background Information: Focus Group No. [insert no.]

It would be really helpful if you could give me some back ground information about yourself. This will be used by me to ensure I have involved a wide range of people in the project and to help me understand the recording of the sessions (e.g. who said what). Thank you.

Name

Gender (male or female)

Age

Marital Status

Country of Origin

Ethnic Identity (e.g. Black British; White British etc.)

Occupation

How long have you been attending Bournville Parish Church, St Francis of Assisi?

What other churches have you attended in the past?

Appendix 3. Collated Results from Initial Four Focus Groups

Social

Someone to talk to (more than neighbours)

Evenings and weekends when there is no one

When in hospital (not) being missed

Need to be not forgotten, not neglected

Home groups – help people grow closer together, helps communication

Social things – café and hospital; entertainment – music and theatre

Suggestion: car service for house bound people

- Take to meeting or relatives

- Transport

Pub Quiz – activity

Isolation & Loneliness

Visits are important – befriending

Isolation – sitting on your own – time to worry (fears)

Training course for visitors

Not everyone wants someone to come to their home

Don't know our neighbours

Knowing how to cook

Different roles for men and women & ways of socialising

“Feeling like I don't exist”

- Do older people get pushed to one side?

- Seen as less valuable

- Able to make a contribution

No family or family a long way away – need neighbours

Good meal

Company

Loss of confidence

- Hard to go out

- Hard to go back to an empty house

How do we know who and where they are?

How do we make contact?

You can be lonely in a crowd

Hard to make effort to get out

Some people find it hard to ask for help – why?

Companionship

Security – someone to contact – to leave keys with

Spiritual Needs

Sheltered housing – someone coming in to do a service

Home communion, but not everyone wants communion at home – transport to church (alternative)

Spiritual Needs: Communion at home once housebound (who takes communion? Vicar?)

Communication – who asks for HC (e.g. daughter?)

“Listening hour”

Visitors from church

Regrets – family break ups

If only? Or maybe no regrets! It’s too late...

End of life – putting things right

“My parents ruined my life” – forgiving my mother – hardest thing

Time to think about these and a place to share

Spiritual help

- More as one gets older
- More aware of mortality

Spiritual needs

- To talk *with* someone (not at)
- Someone to listen
- Can feel neglected or forgotten (even after three or four weeks)

Church

In church – when someone is away for a long time, how do we follow up and visit

Wanting to feel needed – to know we are needed (appreciated/missed/valued) by the church and vicar

Timing of service – start time and length (like family service)

Adults in church

- Need sense of belonging – being noticed / known
- Adult fellowship

- There are a lot of adults in the congregation who feel they don't belong as much as children
- Adults need to be affirmed and nurtured too
- Each stage of life brings its own challenges get to grips with
- Know each other's names; "I don't think anyone knows my name" [not always people in dire straits]
- Discussion groups (miss)
- 3rd Age
- Thursday morning coffee after church (really important)
- Mixing people up
- Refreshments – different areas e.g. seating

Timing of midweek services 10.30 / 11 ish

- Midday service in holy week appreciated
- "I like variety" – big and small

"I don't like the family service"

Quiet and traditional service

Preaching; hymns with traditional tunes; traditional language; quicker hymns; find new hymns difficult; Gregorian chant

Psalms

Familiar

What does Church offer?

People who have never been can be afraid of being judged

Belief

Friendship – greeting

Coming into family – especially for those on their own

Atmosphere

Prepare for end of life – peaceful

Prayer – thanks

How to reach people who are isolated

- Contact through family
- Or neighbours
- Next generation down
- Introductions
- Outreach

In Church

- Noise before the service (distressing)
- Children returning from Sunday school – disruption – timing?

Needs re church

- Transport
- Nice sermon
- Hymns
- Makes me feel better
- Renews peace and contentment
- Need to put something in
- Wisdom to share and receive
- Resent noise of the children – need is for peace
- Somewhere to bring your problems and cares (not nec to share)
- Traditional
- People love the church

How do we keep in touch?

Communication (Connect helps)

Pew watch?

Delicate – handle carefully – not to intrude

How do people ask for communion?

Life Stage Issues

How to decide when to stop and when to carry on e.g. driving – struggle or accept help to remain independent

Hard to make decisions that involve loss

Bereavement – challenge for couples who have never done things separately

Loss of jobs: Redundancy / retirement

Loss of income – access to clubs and extras like holidays

On scrap heap

Loss of colleagues

Loss of structure to time

Like a bereavement

Health

Health – physical and mental

Need to be looking after own health – prevention

Differences for age groups

Exercise – groups - Keeping active

Loneliness – depression – medication

Information – how to get it to people?

Phone calls, leaflets letters, drip feed – slow process

Bereavement – support during... & need to talk in advance

Making new relationships/friendships e.g. attending a group
Need for 'Coffee and Chat' (fellowship not a course)
Could include people who don't come to church
When you are on your own its hard to bother

Practicalities

Transport to church and to hospital or other appointment; Ring and ride? Also means there is someone with them to reassure

Cooking

Sunday lunches

Maintenance of house and home

- Things you can't do
- Upkeep inside and out
- Gardens

Age concern – good contacts

Could the Centre provide a facility for people to use online forms

Neighbourhood watch – caring for each other (should we have a St Francis watch!?!); or Street associations

See the Selly Oak Methodist scheme

Care

Support – e.g. someone to go to an appointment (e.g. doctor)

- Remembering, hearing, being listened to
- Battery for hearing aid
- Sorting out Practical problems
- People we can trust
- People who can help us not just 'the system' – government
- Fill in forms – computer

Visiting people when they are ill

- Some don't want to be seen
- Some the more the merrier
- People need to feel they are not forgotten

Other

Somewhere to go... something to contribute but nowhere to go

Lots of things I could do

Like being motivated

Need to contribute...

... to be appreciated

... a reason to live and thrive

... stimulation

Need to be independent

e.g. Helpers at the day centre, making a contribution

Need to be understood: "only older people understand older people"

Want to be involved with mixed ages

Need friends of all ages

Need to be needed

Loss of jobs

Database: keeping contacts – phone calls (especially when ill)

Shopping / going for a walk

GPs promoting events through posters etc

Food/nutrition

In Bournville – what is the split between living in sheltered housing and own homes?

In age austerity – how meet the gaps in provision

Pets

- Another bereavement
- Loss of exercise and company
- Something to care for

Respite for carers

Carers

Husbands, wives, children

Strain and stress

Caring for people with dementia or who are frail

"I can manage" – won't ask for help

Respite & Support

Done out of love and duty

Carers need someone to off-load to, who isn't family – release the pressure

Purpose – some people need someone to care for

Gender differences

Men's needs: social club / pub

Talking about the past – reminiscence

What we get back from others

Group needs – building trust

- Different personalities

- Need to feel welcome
- Drop in coffee morning
- Need to talk about our lives
- 'Life story work'
- Review – looking back
- Sometimes more important than Bingo
- Can't chat to four walls
- Need to have some control
- This is our group
- What do you want
- Their choice

Need for mental stimulation

How church can look after the carers?

Fears

Being broken into at night (security)

Not being able to go out – loss of mobility

Losing my voice – isolation

Loss of sight and hearing

Fear of dying – being found by family (have my children got the strength of faith to sustain them? Have I let them down?)

Benefit of Group – realize not on own

Exercise and health

- Parks for walking
- Bournville lovely place
- Dog walking
- Ti Chi
- Exercise at day centre
- Folk dancing

Day time is easier for events

Company and conversation

Slowing down –wisdom

Lots of different ways of being an older person

Good to talk with others

Good to have something to look forward to

What do older people need / want?

Companionship

Sense of belonging – having a role

Continuity

Always come to church

Having roots

Sense of identity with church

[Feel that at St Francis church the] Balance moved more to children / families

Like to see children develop

Need for younger to develop respect for different nature of church

Need for reciprocation

Need to be encouraged as a Christian – sound teaching

Being recognized as an individual

Worship includes music

Ways of dealing with loneliness

Facing losing mobility

Need for visits – home communion

Cards from church

Neighbourhood watch

Need for sense of commitment / serving

More openness of church

Last of line

Lose other relations

Need to share with those who have similar memories

Familiarity of experiences

Do voluntary work- sense of worth

Advantages of being old

Retirement

Get a life

Resilience

Re-tyre

Do new things

Select own day off

Get tired because so busy!

Beginners guide to older age

1. Careers – work: next 20 years – volunteering. After work... what to do?
Loss of role and status; ‘Calling’ in older age – how to use your gifts and skills
2. Planning for being older
3. Death and Dying – talking with our families – planning our own funeral;
Preparing for the end of life – making a will, de-cluttering, planning a funeral (very delicate, who with?); Facing loss
4. How to do something new
5. Discovering ‘spaciousness’ in older age – keeping a wider vision – negatives into positives
6. Living for today
7. Social and Health services – how to get the help you need
8. Keeping well – getting the most from your GP
9. Maintaining your health and independence
10. Keeping mentally active
11. Keeping active – regular rhythm for day/week/life
12. Stimulus (many different needs)
13. Keeping balance – energy / activity / limitations
14. Shock of not being able as much
15. Facing fears
16. Finding guidance
17. Information
18. Question time
19. Different issues for men and women
20. How to cope
21. Enjoyment (rewards other than money)
22. Feeling safe
23. Spiritual direction
24. Learn to love yourself
25. Being honest about yourself (true to yourself)
26. Independence and reassurance using modern technology
 - a. Computer
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Ordering from Amazon and Sainsburys
 - d. Telephone and text
27. More dependency – without wanting to ask others to do it for you
28. Relationships with neighbours etc

- 29.Older people can offer time and skills – need to share
- 30.Directory – handy numbers / Bournville pages
- 31.Befriending
- 32.Getting a life
- 33.Money management / finances
- 34.How to keep your mind active
- 35.How to keep going out
- 36.Pets
- 37.How to flourish
- 38.What is important (things that are free!) – people
- 39.Talk to people – more love – music theatre
- 40.Laughter and wine
- 41.Trips out
- 42.Keeping some form of work or helping others
- 43.Relationships
- 44.Keeping relationships in repair – family and friends, share meal
- 45.Communication
- 46.Avoiding isolation
- 47.Keeping yourself active
- 48.Finding stuff to do
- 49.Being aware of what is out there to help (including finances) – e.g. over fifties swim
- 50.How to join a coffee morning

Appendix 4.

Poster for the Ageing Well Course Recruiting Hosts

AGEING·WELL·IN·BOURNVILLE ¶

¶

IN·FEBRUARY·2015·WE·PLAN·TO·OFFER·¶
AGEING·WELL·--·A·SERIES·OF·SESSIONS·ON·
BEING·OVER·55·IN·BOURNVILLE·.....¶

**WE·WOULD·LIKE·THESE·SESSIONS·TO·BE·
RUN·BY·A·TEAM·OF·LOCAL·OLDER·PEOPLE·.....¶**

¶

We're looking for people who are: ¶

- Open to people of all backgrounds ¶
- Willing to learn as part of a team ¶
- Positive about being over 55 ¶
- Able to commit half a day a week for the
next few months ¶

¶

TO EXPRESS AN INTEREST OR FIND OUT MORE CONTACT·
ST·FRANCIS·CHURCH: ¶

¶







Ageing Well is co-ordinated by St Francis Bournville ¶

Appendix 5

Poster Advertising The Ageing Well Course

AGEING WELL GROUP

A Beginners Guide to Being an Older Person

On Thursday Mornings from 10.30 – 12.15,
meeting weekly, from 15th October 2015.

At The St Francis Centre
on Sycamore Road, Bournville B30 2AA

The group will provide a safe space to explore ideas and to share practical wisdom about ageing well. The topics we will be looking at include:

- New steps and challenges
- Keeping mentally and physically active
- Your health and the health services
- Valuing relationships
- Facing Fears and Feeling Safe
- Money Matters
- Legal issues
- Any Questions?

TO BOOK A PLACE OR FIND OUT MORE CONTACT ST FRANCIS CHURCH:



LOTTERY FUNDED

Ageing Well is co-ordinated by St Francis Bournville



APPENDIX 6.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AGEING WELL COURSE PROCESS AND CONTENT





















What follows is an account of the Ageing Well course describing the process and content as it was delivered. This is a descriptive exercise and the analysis and interpretation come later; it is a 'thick' description, giving as much detail as space allows. The course is the key action in the research and so needed recording as fully as possible. This full documentation will allow the course to be replicated in the future. I am aware that to a certain extent, and slightly artificially, I am presenting this as a naïve description and the more theorised reflections follow in the subsequent chapters. Relating this to the second and their stages of the action research cycle (see above p.42) the intention here is to present the observed action as it was enacted and in a pre-reflexive way. This is a deliberate technique in PT, AR and other kinds of phenomenological research (Husserl, 1964; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). A key element and value in PT is that of the practical theologian being self-reflective and self-identified (see above p. 12-15). In respect of this, I have tried to maintain clarity about my own position as vicar, researcher and group member. Where I employ the term 'we' it refers to the research group which included the five leaders/hosts, the external facilitator and myself.

Running the groups

The group sessions ran on Thursdays from 10.30 a.m. to 12 noon, with refreshments available from 10.00 a.m., meeting in the 'Middle Room' of the St Francis Youth and Community Centre in Bournville. The groups started on 5th March 2015 and then ran weekly for eight weeks, with a two week break in the middle for the Easter holidays. The group was attended by 12-14 people each week, with a slight changeover of people as some missed sessions due to prior commitments and others joined in. The participants were a mix of ages within the fifty-five to ninety range; none were of the oldest-old or in the 'fourth-age' of being frail and dependent.

The seating was arranged around four tables positioned in an open diamond formation ('cabaret style') with participants around the outside and the hosts on the inside. This allowed for a mix of small and whole group work and with space for someone presenting to stand at one point of the diamond. A screen was set up for showing short film clips which were used as discussion starters on two occasions.

The groups had a positive tone, people were willing to be open and honest in sharing with each other and there was a good level of discussion. At the end of each session a feedback form was handed out and people take a few minutes to complete this. The format of the evaluation form was range of symbols of faces with different expressions for people to tick (see below) and then space at the bottom for further comments. The facilitator collated these feedback forms and, when appropriate, issues raised were addressed at the next session.

The topic covered:				
How the group was led:				
Guest speakers (if any):				
The venue – comfort, sound etc:				
Would you recommend today's session to someone else?				

My role was to welcome people and set up the technology when needed and to act as a scribe when things need writing up on a flipchart. I occasionally sat in on one table for the conversations. In quite a small room it would not have been possible to be observing from the edge and it felt more appropriate to be engaged as a participant observer.

Creating an Opportunity for Reflection

After each session there was a certain amount of tidying up and then the leadership group with the facilitator and I – as the research team – met for reflection. Over a sandwich lunch the group members spent 10-15 minutes reflecting individually by completing an A4 page set up as a grid with six questions for reflection:

How do I feel after today's session?	What did I learn about ageing?
What did I learn about myself?	What did I learn about others?
What did I learn about community and the church?	What did I learn about God?

Then for about 45 minutes there was a group discussion involving sharing key ideas, reflecting on the session and looking ahead to the coming week. These reflection sessions were recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed (using a third-party transcription service). The completed reflection forms were collated by me. After each session, I noted in my research journal my immediate reactions and any ideas that seemed particularly important. At the end of the eight sessions we asked all the participants to complete an evaluation and the facilitator wrote a report. At the celebration event some of the initial reflections were presented to the whole group with some others who had expressed an interest in participating in a subsequent repeat of the process.

Overview of Course Content

See Appendix 7 for the planning sheets of each session.

Description of Session 1: New steps and challenges

As people arrived they were welcomed and served a drink and a cake. All group leaders/hosts had name badges and participants wrote their names on a sticky label to wear.

This was the first session so time spent in welcome and introductions was especially important. I welcomed everyone and gave a background to the course. I dealt with practical matters such as: location of toilets and fire exits; some introduction to the group hosts and to the facilitator; set out the ground rules of confidentiality; explained about the different styles of session that they could expect; and invited them to participate as fully as possible because the idea of the course was about them sharing their experience and learning from each other. I also made clear that although I am the vicar, and we were meeting in the church community centre, it was not intended as a religious course and everyone was welcome regardless of their faith background or commitment.

One of the hosts led an introductory session. The exercise invited participants to look back to ten years ago and ask themselves: "what were you doing then and what are you doing now that you could not do then; what fascinating or different things are you doing now?" The host also gave a few personal remarks about her own situation her passion for music, transition from work to retirement, different levels of energy and happiness.

A range of responses were elicited including: more time for hobbies and leisure activities such as art, fishing, and theatre; more time in the mornings since not having to go out to work; the opportunity to turn over and go back to sleep and not having to scrape the car windscreen in winter. People described things they missed and taking up new things, and they shared facing difficulties that had tested or made them discover their personal resilience. Other responses included starting to use a walking stick / skiing pole and

becoming self-employed. Some new things were not always chosen but done from necessity, for example, learning to cook after bereavement.

Then another host introduced a short video clip from Britain's Got Talent 2014.¹⁵ The clip is of an older woman dancing with a younger man who later is revealed to be her instructor. The attitude of the judges is initially judgemental and patronising and she is written off. After a few moments of slow dancing, Simon Cowell presses his buzzer to vote them off. Then the music becomes faster and she dances a salsa including being lifted and thrown by her dance partner. The reaction of the audience is one of amazement and at the end of the dance they receive a standing ovation and one of the other judges presses their golden button so that they automatically go through to the final.

In the conversation with the judges after the performance she is recognized as being a fabulous dancer and Simon Cowell apologizes (something he would never usually do). The story she tells is that she has faced some difficult situations including bereavement and decided to do something different. She had danced as a young woman but given it up when she had a family and now in later life she had started to dance again.

The video raised for us as a group the invitation to think about our own attitudes to ageing (that is, our own and other people's) and to raise the challenge of doing something new. Watching the clip led into whole group brainstorm around the question of what challenges do older people face? This moved into a small group discussions about what

¹⁵ ('Spectacular Salsa - Paddy & Nico - Electric Ballroom' from a collection of clips with the title 'Inspiring Old People' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjHnWz3EyHs&list=PLo_nvcMo9R1C086LP3wLdoxMEEalxg_g-)

challenges group members had faced in the last little while and how had they overcome it. The responses to the first question about challenges were written up on a flipchart sheet, and included:

Challenges

- Health
- Mobility
- Stigma
- Coping on own
- Less money
- Learning to cook (after bereavement)
- Tired more quickly
- Motivation
- Staying awake
- Fear / Courage (new things)
- Making most of time (limited)
- Not giving up – push yourself
- New technology
- Memory (why have I come upstairs?)
- Problem with neighbours causing anxiety
- Landlord doesn't do much
- MP help and support
- Vulnerability. Reach out to others
- Elderly mother with dementia. Need home care.
- Extra responsibility. Balance responsibilities e.g. work and family / care
- Coping with a new relationship with someone with a different personality
- Coping with a son moving to Switzerland and grandchildren
- Technology and language

I was a participant observer in one of the small groups which discussed challenges of new relationships, managing time, and caring for older siblings. In relation to facing and overcoming challenges, people shared ideas around accommodating themselves to others, the importance of a sense of humour for helping keep perspective, the importance of maintaining flexibility, and recognizing that one size does not fit all. The group discussed

how people cope when a challenge cannot be overcome. One group member shared about their situation which could not be changed and just had to be dealt with one crisis at a time, recognising that “you just have to do what you can”. The group also reflected on the ability to step back from situations. Someone shared how experiences earlier in life such as the disruption of evacuation during World War II had helped them develop the ability to cope.

After the small group discussions. Another host summarised and reviewed what had happened, expressed the hope that participants had enjoyed the session and that they would come again. They concluded by handing round the evaluation sheets. The session finished slightly early which meant that people got away promptly.

Feedback from the Community Centre staff revealed that they had found the first week’s session a lot to cope with. Although the Centre hosts adult leisure classes every week day those groups are all well-established and have their own routines. It was disruptive to have a new and relatively large group start. As a result of this feedback the logistics about setting up the room, greeting people as they arrive and the serving of teas and coffees were reviewed.

Session 2: Keeping mentally and physically active

The whole experience of session two was calmer from set up onwards. Perhaps this was due to us all knowing what we were doing having done it once before and there seemed to be less adrenaline flowing for all of us. There was a great sense of relief as people came back and some new people joined in so that there were 17 people present.

After a welcome from me and reminder of the ground rules, one of the hosts led an introductory exercise which was both a warm-up and lead-in to the main part of the session. He invited everyone to do some mental arithmetic: your own age divided by 2. The question then was what can you do now that you could not do when you were half your age? People shared their answers in their small groups around the tables. Again, I was a participant observer and, amongst the group I was in, people shared things such as being able to swim a mile, enjoy their free time because they were no longer a slave to the office, enjoy their children, and enjoy their grandchildren. One person from each table shared some of their table's answers with the whole group. We heard that some felt more confident in themselves now than when they were half their age, others felt less pressure to conform and more confident in their own choices without peer group pressure, someone else shared they had been able to develop their own style. Others shared things around technological changes: being able to pick up knowledge very quickly, download a book to a Kindle (electronic reader), having skills and learning how to do all the things related to computers and the internet which were not around half a lifetime ago for all the participants.

With the aim of framing a discussion about remaining active, we watched an 8 minute film produced by NHS Choices about keeping physically active.¹⁶ The next part of the session was to generate a list of ideas around what activities exist locally. In the large group people shared ideas they saw in the film and extended from those for other ideas of mental and physical activity. These were recorded on a flipchart. This then flowed into the next part of

¹⁶ 'Staying active over 60' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1Uoce6hfyc>

the session as in the smaller table groups participants were encouraged to think seriously about these ideas. This was done through an activity whereby members of the groups wrote down on postcards 8-10 ideas of staying mentally or physically active. They were encouraged to choose ideas that seemed possible but that they didn't think people might have done. These cards were then passed on to the next table, so each group received a fresh set of other people's ideas. The small groups were asked to discuss these on the basis that if they had to choose one or two which would they choose and why? Finally, back in the whole group ideas from the tables were summarised and there was some discussion and some time for any questions. Evaluation sheets were given out and people thanked and encouraged to come back next week.

One of the outcomes of the discussion about activities was that a member of the group shared that they go gliding. They offered to take out anyone interested on a gliding trip. Several people expressed an interest and this happened a few months later.

Watching the film prompted one of the more interesting and disruptive moments of the course. When invited people to share their reactions and responses to the film there was lots of talking. A critical moment for this session came when someone asked in a very negative tone "What's the point?" This prompted a lot of reflection and learning, later, on the part of the hosts. There was a very good and serious point being made by the participant who had experienced the message of the film as being a selfish one: it being all about keeping me going for my own sake. They were the only person to pick up on this. The difficult aspect was that this criticism of the film was communicated with a very strong negative emotional force behind it, which the group hosts found very deflating. We were

left with questions around whether keeping mentally and physically active is appropriate self-care, to what extent should our activity be directed towards others rather than ourselves, and can we see ourselves as intrinsically valuable even when our activity is not geared to producing anything useful.

Session Three: New and existing relationships

After a welcome and reminder of the ground rules, there was a warm up activity intended to get everyone talking and to help participants get to know each other. In table groups, people were asked to think of a famous person they would like to invite to a meal and why.

This session fell into three main parts: getting participants to think about the people they value; to recognize or imagine how those people might also value them; and to help people imagine new relationships. The focus for this activity was completing a work sheet which at the start was a piece of paper with three circles drawn on it. The task was introduced with a demonstration and some personal sharing from two of the hosts to illustrate what was to be done. This also role modelled what we felt was an appropriate level of sharing and self-disclosure.

The work sheet was completed by each individual writing in the circles three relationships they value. The kind of relationships were identified with a different kind of line. Participants then wrote beside the circles what they value about that person. They then shared with the person next to them something about one or two of those people.

The second part of the task was again demonstrated and participants were now asked to write down how these people might also value them. If they weren't confident they could write what the person *might* value about them. Participants were strongly encouraged to write something at this point. There was then some discussion with neighbours about how easy or difficult it had been to do this exercise. The supplementary question was: do we value ourselves and what can we do about it?

On the worksheet in one corner were three hexagons. Participants were now invited to imagine someone new they would like to meet. They were then asked to write in the hexagons three characteristics of these people. They then shared in pairs and on the table groups if confident what these might be. Allowing space for uncertainty, for sharing in the whole group and to shape thoughts there was a general discussion about what had been interesting or difficult about that exercise. Participants were asked to reflect on whether they saw themselves and their existing relationships differently and whether they could imagine making new connections.

Session Four: Feeling safe, keeping safe

Present were 11 participants, 4 hosts, plus the facilitator and myself.

The warm up activity was in table groups, participants were asked to think of 'A risk you have recently taken – and was it worth it?' There was an interesting range of responses including accepting having a carer to help, moving into a new place and into sheltered

housing, driving to London to see grandchildren (it was worth it!), finishing work and still having to support oneself.

The next part of the session was a reflection on what it is that we want to be safe from. The reflection began with the facilitator recounting a story of an older person wondering about risk and danger. This was a personal encounter at a large railway station which is hard to navigate. On reaching the concourse he had met an older woman pulling a large and heavy suitcase. He offered to help. She was heading for the Penzance train, she wasn't panicking but was thinking she would miss her train. There is a sign saying that if you are carrying luggage do not use the escalator but use the lift and she could not find the lift. She said to him, "My daughter said I could make the journey myself." He said, "Come on, let's go!" and he took the enormous suitcase down the escalator. She caught the train. It turned out she was on the way to Torquay for her 70th birthday party, and meeting her daughter (who had flown in from Australia) on the way at Bristol. When he thought about it he asked himself should he have helped and should she have accepted? We were invited to put ourselves in her mind and ask what did she want or need.

As a whole group participants made suggestions and these were written up on a flip chart: What did this lady want? What did this lady need? Did she have any conflicting desires? This led into a discussion about what it is that we fear when we take risks. Several things were identified including the fear of failure and fear of the unknown. We wondered about the challenge of facing our fears and the fears that prevent us from taking risks. A participant also pointed to the difference between worrying for ourselves and for others.

From this reflection we moved on to work in small groups to think about what it is that frightens us. Small cards were distributed and people wrote down on a card something that they fear. The cards were then collected and distributed around the other tables. Each group then discussed the fears they had received: which is most frightening, which is most likely? Some of the things that were named were fear of flying, of talking to strangers, of not being able to drive and so losing independence, and of developing Alzheimer's or dementia.

This exercise was one of the least successful in the course because people came up with things that were very similar, so the discussion was limited. Even at the time the facilitator and hosts were aware of this but it was not possible to change the activity midway through. We realised it would have been better to have some pre-written cards as well as the ones generated by the group to ensure that some wider discussion was possible.

The discussion moved on to think about risks that are worth taking in our own lives. What would that fear stop you doing? Are there any risks worth taking? Linking back to the story at the start of the session, there was then a discussion in small groups around feelings about being protected by others. What are the good and bad feelings about being protected (see photo, Appendix 8)?

We had called this session 'feeling safe, keeping safe', and some thought it was going to be or should have been about personal safety and home security. It was, however, a session about taking risks and not letting fear diminish our lives by stopping us doing things

that are ultimately worthwhile and life enhancing. I shared a quote that I had come across only the week before: “A ship is safe in harbour, but that's not what ships are for.”¹⁷

After these first four weeks there was a two-week break for the Easter holidays. When designing the course, from the beginning we had thought that we might have some sessions where an invited speaker would provide some input, especially if we felt that there was some expert knowledge that we did not have. It was decided that four of the eight planned sessions would benefit from having an external speaker, and due to their availability they all ended up with the dates in the second half of the course. This led to a change in group dynamic, but it seemed to work having done the more reflective sessions first.

Session Five: Money Matters:

Present: 12 participants; 4 hosts; facilitator, speaker and me

Because we were unsure whether we had enough knowledge in the area of finance we decided to bring in some external expertise and so invited someone from Age UK Birmingham to lead this session. The speaker set the scene by saying that everybody has a financial life but it is not often talked about. In most groups or communities there is a mix of those who struggle, and some who are affluent, but most people have some worries about

¹⁷ attributed to John A. Shedd, who in 1928 released a collection of sayings titled “Salt from My Attic”.

money. He acknowledged that it is a time of austerity and the financial landscape is changing but assured the group that there is help and advice available.

He then worked through a resource paper that he had produced with Age UK Birmingham and had previously used with other groups. The first part was a 'credit crunch checklist' based on the thrifty skills of older people and money-saving tips, first learnt through the experience of wartime rationing. He had a list of 36 money saving tips and a financial fitness checklist. The next part was financial planning exercise involving drawing up a household budget. Included with the handout was a table with various headings which participants could complete adding in their own income and expenditure. He took questions and there was a lot of discussion around various points including pension credits, the local bank shutting and the pros and cons of online banking, whether a funeral plan really was a good idea, and grants for new gas boilers.

The last part of the session was a craft activity which was remarkably successful. People were given a kit to make their own piggy bank, by sticking various pre-prepared things onto a jam jar and drawing on some additional markings. Whilst people were happily doing this they talked amongst themselves in an informal way about the issues that had been presented and discussed in the whole group. During this activity, the speaker was available in the coffee bar area for people to go to talk to for a one-to-one confidential conversation.

Session Six: Death and Dying

The impetus for including a session on the theme of death and dying came from a participant in the focus groups who volunteers with the community centre's elderly lunch club. Several club members had found that they were not able to talk about issues of death and dying with their relatives because their relatives did not want to have that conversation. So we thought that this would be a good issue to include in order to allow a space for the issue to be discussed and also to enable participants to feel more confident to have that conversation with others. A retired clergyperson had offered to help contribute to this session and he wanted to involve a person from another local church; as a planning group we thought that having these voices of experience would be helpful as we engaged with this topic. It turned out to be the least popular session with our course participants.

As participants arrived they were served teas and coffees and there were cakes available. On the table were some pictures of tombstones or memorial with famous and/or humorous epitaphs. This was intended as a light but not too frivolous way of facing the subject of death and dying. The speakers were welcomed and introduced and the usual practical matters and ground rules reiterated.

The speakers began with some engaging and often funny anecdotes to set the scene. One observation that was picked up later in conversation was the way people always say "If I die" – why do they not say "When I die"? Then they introduced the idea of death and, in particular, the concept of 'a good death'. It was noted that people die at any age, not just in old age, and that death is inevitable. It was also acknowledged that everyone present would have, in some way, experienced grief, loss and that accompanying sense of abandonment.

The speakers raised the question of how hard it can be to talk about death and if there is anything that can be done to make it easier. They observed that if we do not find it hard then often our children do. We often make light of it or employ euphemisms to avoid directly facing the issue of dying.

The idea of a good death was introduced and in small groups people discussed what that might mean in general and asked themselves “what might be a good death for me?” People fed back from the small groups and ideas were written down. Answers included being free of pain and not suffering, at peace, having shared with people how I feel about them, having left things in order and all the loose ends tied up, with family and friends having said goodbye, with prayer, conscious and knowing what is happening.

The next part of the session was to think about what a good death might mean for those around me. The range of answers included having said goodbye, without distress, not in hospital, with respect, not before time, well cared for, reconciled with those around them, being present and there for them, with the family history gathered and left behind for others.

The next part of the session was intended to reorient participants to think about living having faced dying. Because we are going on living there is a chance to do things differently. One of the speakers then reflected on the range of ideas from completing a bucket list, writing your life story (for others or just for you), compiling the soundtrack of our lives, and thinking about what you want to be remembered for.

After the session our initial reflections were mixed in that we felt a hard subject had been dealt with well but that it had been a quieter session. There had been some deep sharing amongst participants but the way the discussion tasks had been set up was not been clear enough with too many questions and possibilities. Some people struggled to understand what was being asked of them. Some hosts were wondering whether we should include this topic were we to run the course again. Others wondered if the session had been long enough. There was the hope that even if it had not gone quite as we had hoped it had at least modelled that it is OK to talk about this topic. There was a sense that the morning had still been, what one of the group hosts called, a 'place of grace' – even though it had not been all that we had hoped or intended.

Session Seven: Legal issues

The guest speaker for this session was a solicitor who specialises in elderly client work: inheritance and estates, house clearance, power of attorney and wills. She is a close friend of one of the hosts. After the usual refreshments and introductions there was a presentation about wills and lasting power of attorney. Then she led a reflection based on a case study from a real-life situation she had dealt with.

The content of the presentation focussed firstly on the importance of wills. A recent estimate is that there are 30 million people in the UK without wills. If you do not have a will when you die then the state effectively makes one for you in that your children inherit when they are 18. It is probably the most important document you can do and costs £150-200 to

get a lawyer to do. She advised to keep it up to date such as making sure that the beneficiaries are still around.

Lasting power of attorney (LPA) is about delegating decision making and is underpinned by the Mental Capacity Act. The importance of this act is that mental capacity is presumed and the idea is that people should always be allowed to make as much of the decision as possible and that their views should be taken into account. Decisions made on behalf of another are function specific and there are two types: property and financial affairs; and health and welfare. With property and financial affairs, having an LPA allows the attorney to do things on the donor's behalf such as go to the bank, write cheques, claim pension, and sell the house. In the case of health and welfare, the LPA allows the attorney to make decisions on someone's behalf when, and only when, the donor has lost mental capacity. This might include, for example, making a decision about their care package following a stroke; end of life decisions such as do not resuscitate instructions, use of antibiotics, or withdrawal of hydration and nutrition. This is an add-on in that it allows the family to make decisions but it cannot force a doctor to decide. It can also rule out family making end-of-life decisions.

The process of making an LPA is relatively simple to do from a pro-forma document available on the internet, but it is also relatively simple to get it wrong. Part of the bureaucratic process involves application to the Office of Public Guardians who may throw it out. There are checks and balances to minimize financial abuse, which though it can be minimized cannot be eliminated entirely. At the point of signing a power of attorney an

independent person, who may be a doctor, lawyer, social worker or health care professional, has to verify that the donor has mental capacity.

The case study drew out issues of presumption of capacity and in whose best interest the decisions were being taken. It was a long and slightly complicated story but it was very engaging and all the participants got involved in discussing the case and wanted to know what the actual outcome had been.

Session Eight: Your health and the health services

From the early stages of planning we had hoped to include a session with a local GP to address issues of health and how to make the best use of health services. A member of the church congregation who is a GP was willing to be involved but the only date they could make was the last session. We had not originally planned this as the last session in the series but afterwards participants complimented us on saving the best until last.

We had a very simple 'Question and Answer' format for this session, but we wanted to have a way of collating and prioritising the questions to make best use of the time. In small groups around the tables participants discussed the questions they would like to ask. The groups then reported these and they were written up on the flipchart. This created an agenda for the GP to speak to for about 45 minutes as she addressed those questions. This went very well but we did not cover all the subjects. The last 20 minutes of the session had been reserved for evaluation, but we changed the programme to give more time to the GP. She had prepared some input for the group on "how you can help us to help you" and she

presented this as the last part of the session. The content and the way she spoke was excellent and participants were very positive in their feedback.

For the very end of the session I thanked everyone and gave out the evaluation forms for the whole course to take away instead of completing them as part of this last session. I also gave out invitations to a celebration event two weeks later, which would be a coffee morning inviting everyone who had attended the course and with an open invitation to anyone else who wanted to find out what we had been doing and who might be interested in joining in with a second run of the course.

Evaluation meeting for the hosts

The following week the group hosts met with the facilitator and me for an evaluation of the whole course. We reviewed the collated feedback from the week-by-week evaluation sheets and shared our own reflections. At this point I also sought to involve them in data analysis and interpretation and introduced to them to Edward de Bono's 'Thinking Hats' (see next chapter).

Celebration Event ('Week 9')

The purpose of this event was to create an opportunity to celebrate our time together on the course and to thank people; to review the sessions in an open way; and also, to recruit new members.

The timing and venue for the event was the same for the course meetings but the format was slightly different. We began together in small groups, then moved through to the coffee-bar area for drinks and cakes as a break in the middle of the morning. People continued talking informally over their refreshments and then we drew people back together for a final plenary.

Some people attending the celebration event were those interested in finding out about what we had done and to see if they might join in with a repeat of the course. For their benefit and as a review for participants we summarised what we had done over the previous eight weeks of the course. This gave an opportunity to say thank you to everyone involved and for anyone to ask questions.

Part of what we did by way of reflection was to draw out from participants their perception of the messages about ageing that they receive from the world around them. We tried to emphasise the positive and where there were negative perceptions to show, where possible, how they had been countered by the positive discussions we had shared as a group. One interesting comment from a participant was that we could have done this as the opening session of the course as a way of making explicit the ethos and approach we were taking.

We asked for peoples' views on what they thought had gone most well and for ideas about how we might improve or develop the course. There were some interesting suggestions as to other topics we might include in future. Through these conversations, we hoped to tease out some of the ways in which the course had made a positive impact on the participants. Participants who wished to keep in touch were invited to sign up on a sheet of

paper giving their contact details. One of the hosts of the course offered to co-ordinate some follow up events.

APPENDIX 7. SESSION PLANS FOR THE AGEING WELL COURSE

Session One: New Steps and Challenges

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.40
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	Peter welcomes all, introduces course, venue, basic ground rules
<i>Leader:</i>	Peter
<i>Resources :</i>	None needed

Icebreaker	
<i>Time:</i>	10.40-10.55
<i>Purpose:</i>	Warm up group, give people a chance to get to know each other, create a buzz
<i>Activity:</i>	Ask people, on their tables, to answer the question 'one thing you think is better than ten years ago.' Instruct people to introduce themselves, share an idea, and capture some interesting ones to feed back.
<i>Leader:</i>	Joan
<i>Resources :</i>	None needed

Video	
<i>Time:</i>	10.45-10.55
<i>Purpose:</i>	Set scene for next exercise
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present video which shows Paddy and Nico doing Salsa https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjHnWz3EyHs&list=PLO_nvcMo9R1C086LP3wLdoxMEEalxg_g- • Invite reaction (10 minute discussion)
<i>Leader:</i>	Simon or Donald + Peter with the video
<i>Resources :</i>	Laptop, screen, internet connection

New Steps, New Challenges:	
<i>Time:</i>	11:10-11:50
<i>Purpose:</i>	What challenges do Older People face
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donald to lead 'brainstorm' session to hear and share ideas about what challenges older people may face – or choose to take on. • In smaller table groups of 3-4, individuals to share challenges met and how they've been overcome.
<i>Leader:</i>	Donald, with Sue as scribe One member of the team on each table: allow conversation to unfold but make sure all get their chance to speak. Make sure that the group is ready to feedback an idea.
<i>Resources :</i>	Flipchart, flipchart paper, pens

Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00
<i>Purpose:</i>	Round off the session and find out what people thought
<i>Activity:</i>	Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sum up session • Ask if there are any questions about this week or next? • Thank people for taking part
<i>Leader:</i>	Felicity
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation sheets, pens

Session Two: Keeping Mentally and Physically Active

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.40 <i>Leader:</i> Peter
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	Peter welcomes all, introduces course, venue, basic ground rules
<i>Resources :</i>	None needed

Icebreaker	
<i>Time:</i>	10.40-10.55 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Warm up group, help people to get to know each other.
<i>Activity:</i>	In table groups, ask people to think of 'one thing that you can do now that you couldn't when you were half your age.'
<i>Resources :</i>	None

Video	
<i>Time:</i>	10.45-10.55 NHS Choices <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Present issues and ideas around remaining active, to frame discussion
<i>Activity:</i>	Watch this 8 minute video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1Uoce6hfyc
<i>Resources :</i>	Screen, laptop, wifi

Staying Active part 1	
<i>Time:</i>	11:10-11:25 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Get a range of ideas about what activities exist ...
<i>Activity:</i>	In the large group, ask people for what ideas they saw in the film. After a few minutes, to extend the activity, ask for other ideas of mental and physical activity. Record on flipchart as we go.
<i>Resources :</i>	Flipchart and pens
Staying Active part 2	
<i>Time:</i>	11:25-11:35 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	... and to encourage people to think seriously about these ideas
<i>Activity:</i>	Split into table groups. Ask each group to try to write down on postcards an idea of 'a way of staying mentally or physically active'. Choose 4-5 ideas that seem possible but that you don't think other people might have done.
<i>Resources :</i>	Postcards, pens
Staying Active part 3	
<i>Time:</i>	11:35-11:50 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	... and to encourage people to think seriously about these ideas
<i>Activity:</i>	Pass the postcards on to the next table. Ask groups to discuss: if they had to choose one or two, which would they choose and why.
<i>Resources :</i>	Postcards, pens
Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Round off the session and find out what people thought
<i>Activity:</i>	Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if there are any questions about this week or next? • Thank people for taking part
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation forms, pens

Session Three: Valuing relationships

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.35
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	Welcomes and revisit basic ground rules
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	None needed

Icebreaker	
<i>Time:</i>	10.35-45
<i>Purpose:</i>	Warm up group, help people to get to know each other/
<i>Activity:</i>	In table groups, ask people to think of "Which famous person would you invite to a meal and why?"
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	None needed

Valuing Relationships - 1	
<i>Time:</i>	10.45-11.05
<i>Purpose:</i>	Get people to think about those they value
<i>Activity:</i>	<p>Demonstrate with an example on a flipchart</p> <p>Each individual writes, in the circles on the printed sheet, three relationships they value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the kind of relationship with a different kind of line. • Write, beside the circles, what you value about this person. • Share with the person next to you something about 1-2 of those people.
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	Printed sheet with three circles on it Flipchart, flipchart pens

Valuing Relationships - 2	
<i>Time:</i>	11:05-11:20
<i>Purpose:</i>	To recognize or imagine how those people might also value us
<i>Activity:</i>	<p>Demonstrate again, on flipchart. Ask each individual to write what this person values about them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they aren't confident, write what the person might value about them; • Strongly encourage people to write something in this exercise; • Discuss with partners how easy or difficult it is to do this exercise. Do we value ourselves? What can we do about it?
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	Flipchart, flipchart paper, pens

Valuing Relationships - 3	
<i>Time:</i>	11:20-35
<i>Purpose:</i>	Get people to imagine new relationships
<i>Activity:</i>	<p>Demonstrate again, on flipchart. Ask people to imagine someone they would like to meet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write in hexagons three characteristics • Share with pairs and in wider table groups if you're confident.
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	Postcards and pens

Reflecting Together	
<i>Time:</i>	11:35-11:50
<i>Purpose:</i>	Allow space for uncertainty, sharing in the whole groups, and to shape thoughts.
<i>Activity:</i>	Lead general discussion. Ask what has been interesting. What has been difficult. Do you look at your existing relationships any differently? Yourself? Can you imagine making new connections?
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	

Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00
<i>Purpose:</i>	Evaluate session
<i>Activity:</i>	Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask if there are any questions about this week or next?• Thank people for taking part
<i>Leader:</i>	?
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation sheets, pens

Session Four: Feeling Safe, Keeping Safe

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.35 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	
<i>Resources :</i>	

Icebreaker	
<i>Time:</i>	10.35-10.45 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Warm up group, help people to get to know each other.
<i>Activity:</i>	In table groups, ask people to think of 'A risk you have recently taken – and was it worth it?'
<i>Resources :</i>	None

What do we want to be safe from?	
<i>Time:</i>	10.45-11.00 <i>Leader:</i> Simon?
<i>Purpose:</i>	Explore what it is that worries us
<i>Activity:</i>	<p>Recount a story of an older person wondering about risk and danger*</p> <p>Large groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did this lady want • What did this lady need • Did she have any conflicting desires
<i>Resources :</i>	Simon's story (below). Powerpoint images to illustrate the story.

Real dangers in older age	
<i>Time:</i>	11.05-11.20 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Give people an opportunity to explore what they're frightened by
<i>Activity:</i>	Write on cards on thing that you are scared of. Do not show anyone else what you have written. Put the card upside down. Collect in all the cards, then distribute them randomly, 3-4 to a table. Discuss the fears that you have received. - Which do you think is the most frightening? - Which do you think is the most likely? - Which do you think a police officer would be most worried about, for you? - Which do you think a doctor would be most worried about, for you? - Which do you think a priest would be most worried about, for you?
<i>Resources :</i>	Cards and pens.
Risks worth taking	
<i>Time:</i>	11:20-11.35 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Introduction to thinking about risks in your own life
<i>Activity:</i>	Looking again at the two cards your table chose, discuss: - What would that fear stop you doing? - Are there any risks worth taking
<i>Resources :</i>	Previously prepared cards.
Being protected	
<i>Time:</i>	11.35-11.50 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Allow space for uncertainty, sharing in the whole group, and to shape thoughts
<i>Activity:</i>	Thinking back to the story at the start of the session, discuss in small groups: - What did Simon protect this lady from? - How might you have felt in that situation? - Positive feelings - Negative feelings
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation forms, pens

Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Evaluate session
<i>Activity:</i>	Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if there are any questions about this week or next? • Thank people for taking part
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation forms, pens

* On New Street Station I met a woman about my mother's age, travelling with a very large suitcase. She was looking slightly uncertain. New Street Station is a station I use a lot, but it's in the middle of being rebuilt, and I know many people find it disorientating, so I slowed down to talk to her. She wanted to get to Platform 7, for a train to Penzance. She was worried as her connecting train had been late arriving. She saw a sign saying 'If you have heavy luggage, use the lift' but she could not find the lift. I offered to take the luggage for her, down the escalator. She accepted. As we travelled she told me she was going to Brixham to celebrate her 70th birthday. She would meet her daughter at Bristol on the way. Her daughter had worked out her travel route today. She originally declined my help, saying she ought to be able to manage herself. I wasn't sure where the lift was, but I felt she would be happier if I could get her to her platform quickly, so I insisted on taking her large suitcase down the escalator for her, and she followed me. We got to the platform in good time, and I left her there.

Fear Cards – For session on Facing Fears and Feeling Safe

Fear of losing my mental capacities i.e. dementia or Alzheimer's	Fear of change of circumstances (I like where I am)
Fear of failure	Fear of becoming a burden on others
Fear of talking with strangers whether on buses, trains or even neighbours	Fear of flying (but I need to fly to see my family who now live abroad)
Fear of letting people down or upsetting them	Fear of being alone
Fear of conflict	Fear of dying
Fear of getting lost when travelling on my own	Fear for the future for my grandchildren – what will their world be like?
Fear of drowning	Fear of losing my mobility so that I cannot get out to join in with things
	Fear of losing my independence and having to be dependent on others

Session Five: Money Matters

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.35 <i>Leader: Felicity</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	

Money Matters: Talk	
<i>Time:</i>	10.35-11.00 <i>Leader: Donald</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	To share about messages about money and draw out specific queries to use for on line slot later
<i>Activity:</i>	General discussion using family sayings about money plus personal experiences of useful tips leading to draw out questions for on line exploration
<i>Resources :</i>	Flip chart

Money Matters: Budgeting	
<i>Time:</i>	11.00-11.25 <i>Leader: Frank</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Budgeting; income and expenditure. Plus some tips
<i>Activity:</i>	Flip chart listing of expenditure and income
<i>Resources :</i>	

On line answer of queries	
<i>Time:</i>	11.25-11.45 <i>Leader: Peter</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Respond to earlier queries list
<i>Activity:</i>	Peter using laptop and large screen to access web sites like Age UK , Money Advice Centre etc

Craft exercise and Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.55-12.00 <i>Leader: Joan</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Fun activity to close session plus usual Evaluation forms
<i>Activity:</i>	Joan showed us how to make Piggy Bank pots to collect loose change. Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask if there are any questions about this week or next?• Thank people for taking part
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation forms, pens

Session Six: Death and Dying

On tables: sheet with interesting and funny epitaphs.

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.35 <i>Leader: Peter</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	

A good death	
<i>Time:</i>	10.35-10.55 <i>Leader: David/Penny</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Introduce the idea that we can think of and plan for 'a good death'
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David/Penny set the scene with a few minutes personal experience - Ask table groups to describe examples of 'a good death'. What made it good? - In plenary, ask what was challenging or interesting in your discussion
<i>Resources :</i>	-

A good death for me	
<i>Time:</i>	10.55-11.15 <i>Leader: David/Penny</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	A chance to reflect on what we want for our own death
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David/Penny set the scene with a few minutes personal experience - Ask table groups to imagine what a good death would look like for them - In plenary, ask what was challenging or interesting in your discussion.
<i>Resources :</i>	-

A good death, for those around me	
<i>Time:</i>	11:15-11.35 <i>Leader: David/Penny</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Introduction to thinking about risks in your own life
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - David/Penny set the scene with a few minutes personal experience - Ask table groups to imagine what a good death would look like for those around them. - In plenary, ask what was challenging or interesting in your discussion.
<i>Resources :</i>	-

How do we talk about death	
<i>Time:</i>	11.35-11.50 <i>Leader: David/Penny</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Help people talk to those in their life about their own death
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David/Penny set the scene, explain that talking about death to those we love can be difficult • Ask table groups to reflect on what's stops them personally talking about this with the people that matter, and what they could do?
<i>Resources :</i>	-

Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Evaluate session. Provide some 'closure' to the session.
<i>Activity:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask people in plenary how people have felt. Capture responses on flipchart. • Thank people for taking part • Share and collect evaluation sheets.
<i>Resources :</i>	Flipchart, flipchart pens. Evaluation forms, pens.

Session Eight: Your health and the health services: GP speaker

Welcome	
<i>Time:</i>	10.30-10.35 <i>Leader:</i> Peter
<i>Purpose:</i>	Welcome and orientate people
<i>Activity:</i>	Peter welcomes all, make any reminders necessary
<i>Resources :</i>	-

Icebreaker	
<i>Time:</i>	10.35-10.45 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Warm up group, help people to get to know each other.
<i>Activity:</i>	Ask people, on their tables, to answer the question 'one thing you like about your body.' – could be appearance, function etc. Instruct people to introduce themselves, share an idea, and capture some interesting ones to feed back.
<i>Resources :</i>	-

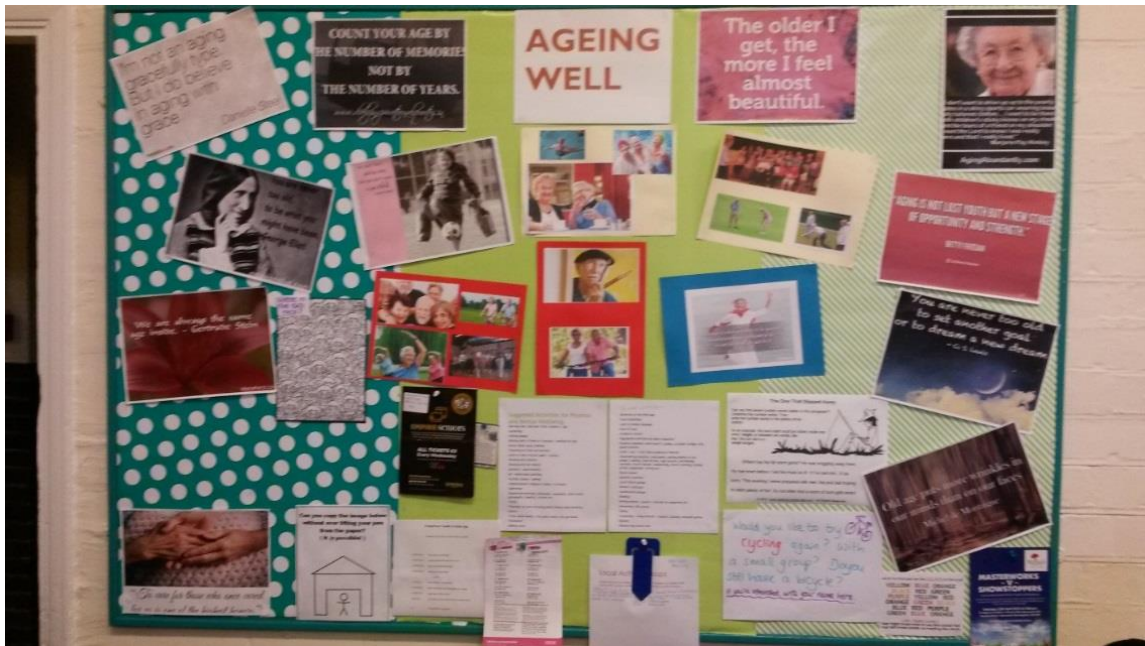
Prepare for GP	
<i>Time:</i>	10.45-11.00 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Make sure that time spent with GP is useful to all members. Make sure questions are not focussed on individual circumstances.
<i>Activity:</i>	Ask people to suggest questions that we as a group could ask the GP. Ask for questions about ageing, and about using health services Record questions on flipchart.
<i>Resources :</i>	-

GP session	
<i>Time:</i>	11:00-11:50 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Explore concerns about how health develops and how to use the health system
<i>Activity:</i>	Go round the room, asking each person in turn to read a question out to the GP (this helps all members of the group 'own' all the questions)
<i>Resources :</i>	Pre-recorded questions

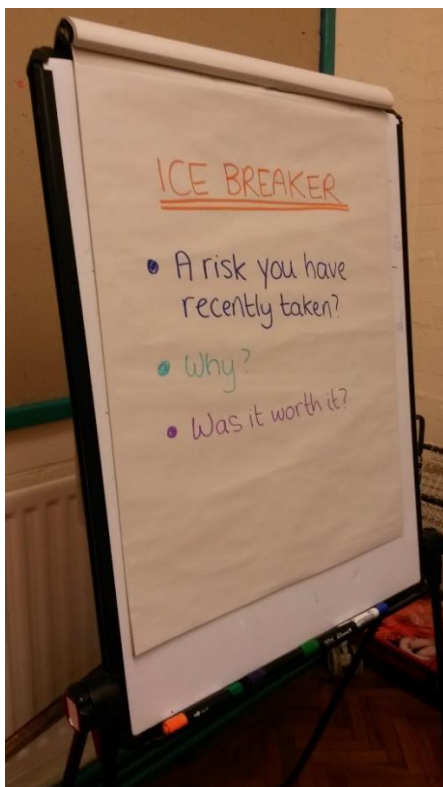
Staying Active part 2	
<i>Time:</i>	? <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	
<i>Activity:</i>	If the GP leaves before the end of the session, allow time for reflection within the large group.
<i>Resources :</i>	

Evaluation and close:	
<i>Time:</i>	11.50-12.00 <i>Leader:</i>
<i>Purpose:</i>	Round off the session and find out what people thought
<i>Activity:</i>	Share evaluation sheets and pens. Explain purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if there are any questions about this week or next? • Thank people for taking part
<i>Resources :</i>	Evaluation forms, pens

Appendix 8: Photographs of the Ageing Well Course in action

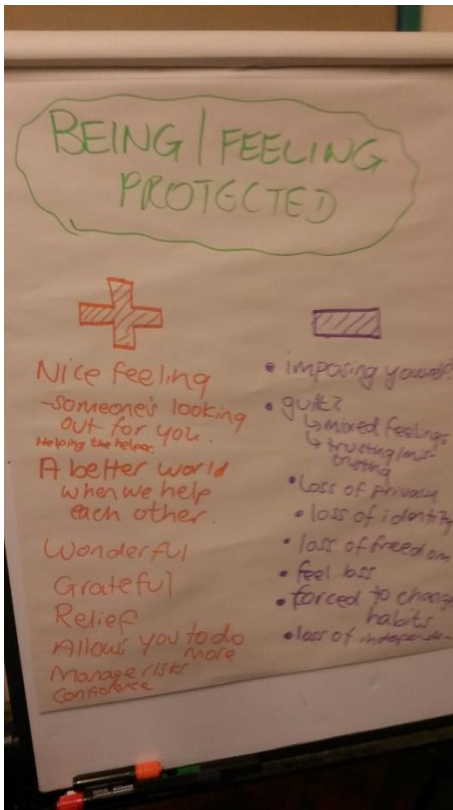


Display board in the Middle Room at the St Francis Youth and Community Centre
The images and quotation could be added to during the course.



Week 4: discussion exercise ice-breaker.

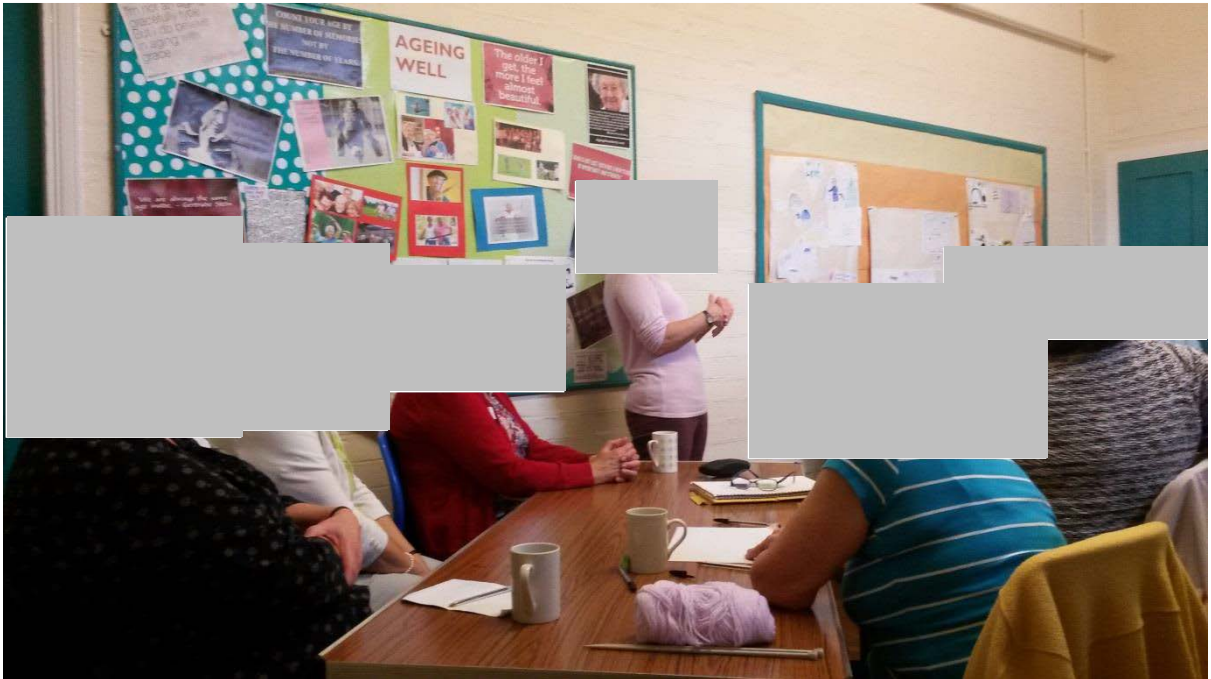
Questions for discussion were written up on flip charts in this way to give people a place to check back to during the activity and to help ensure clarity with instructions.



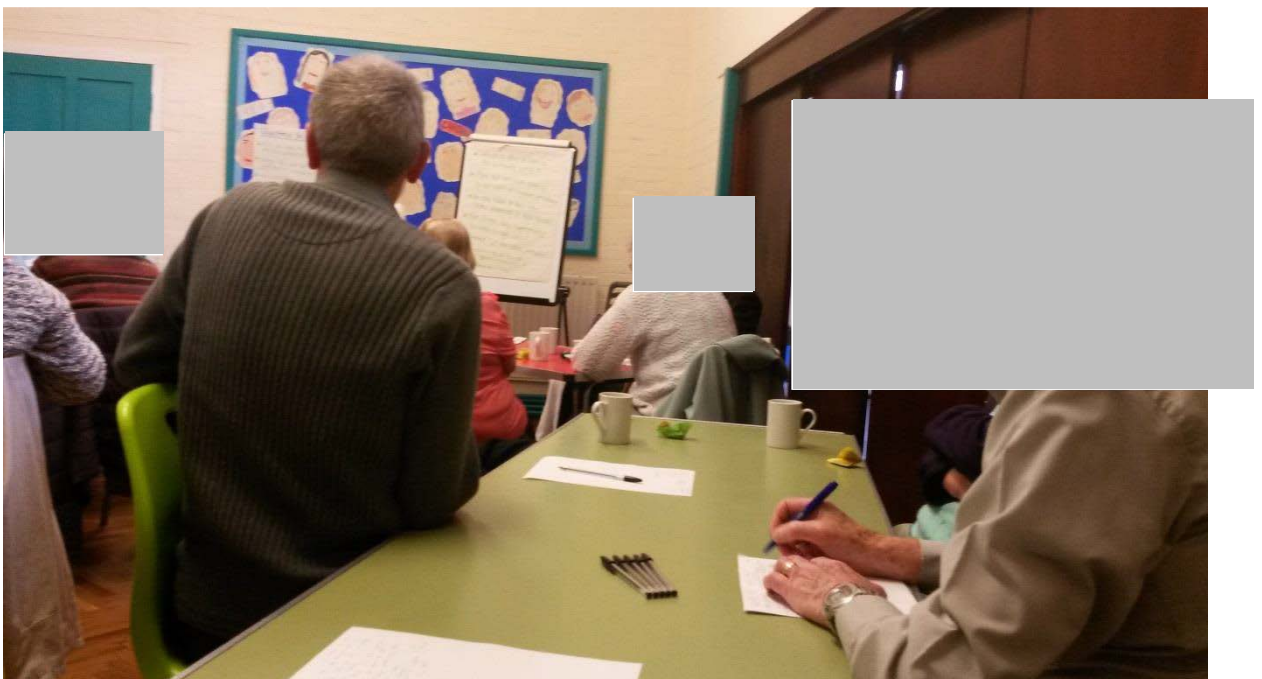
Week 4: Concluding discussion – What are the good and bad feelings about being protected?



The facilitator working the room.



Week 8: The GP responding to questions.



Week 8: The other half of the room.
The flip chart sheets record the questions the group wanted to ask the GP.



'Week 9' Celebration Event: Refreshments in the foreground

Appendix 9: Example Transcript of One Reflection Group

Transcript of Ageing Well Reflection Session 4 [Names of Course Attenders Changed]

Note that the names of the hosts who are speaking have been removed because they occurred frequently and that distorted the findings when analyzing the transcripts with NVivo. Where the names of hosts taking part in discussion occur in the text I have replaced them with initials. The analysis was carried out on words longer than one character.

It's really good, and he actually talked twice to the group, which is a big step for Robert.

So it was a really good thing, wasn't it, that Robert felt able to share and --

He must feel really comfortable then, mustn't he?

He is... growing in his sense of security, I think probably. I'm just going to turn the recording level up a little bit.

So thank you very much, so that's probably too much, its saying over to me now. So here we are: session 4, halfway through. It's funny, I felt quite different after this session, and it was odd for me not being not being here last week as well.

Last week was very good and we even talked about God last week.

Interesting. So tell me, how do the rest of you feel after today, today's session but also at this half way point, looking back? That'd be interesting for me.

I thought it was a good one. I thought it was lighter. Last week was very heavy. This week, the chatter was going all the time and I thought it was a very successful one.

Did you not think it was last week?

Well, I am sure it was very, very good. I just found it very heavy and very thought-provoking, which is no bad thing, of course. But just the comparison, this week, I noticed how much lighter it was. And yet, it was talking about a serious subject.

I think we're getting into a good pattern in sort of moving from one person or member of the team to the next in terms of presenting, and that's going very smoothly. And the confidence in presenting is growing. You can see it definitely. Certainly, you looked a lot more confident. And F, you just took charge of conducting two bits when you weren't expecting to.

I was ready to come up, you see, and you just carried on, so I thought great.

[Off mic.]

I found it more difficult to get into the subject today than I've done on previous ones. I was wondering whether, kind of, each session tended to cross over the one before. So there were lots of similar things through each of the different ones.

Someone made the point about the last week's session might have been better further on when there was more trust in the group, which I think that, but of course we have to juggle this within --

That's right.

-- when and how we could get certain speakers in on some of the --

Yes, I think that is right. And actually, probably we should have swapped these two around, in actual fact. And was that Susan who made that point-- yeah, and I think Susan had a conversation with Jim about over the weekend that we can -- so I think that's fair enough. But I think in the kind of time to work out the right order of the sessions would be at the end the course. And that's something we'll definitely consider to review.

So just to sum up, that was -- someone said just that last week was actually -- you know, was that too challenging for its place in the sequence of the course, and it might be better later on or --

I thought it seemed fine last week, personally, I thought it was good.

So that's something just to bear in mind, and as S says, we will evaluate the whole thing and we got the whole perspective. Sometimes you just have to work with where things -- we haven't planned this to be a sequential course. It's not like building blocks --

No.

Number 3 has to come after number 2, and number 4 has to come after number 3. Sort of, each one does stand alone, I think. But it's --

It was interesting yesterday, though, what David [speaker for later session] wanted to know who was coming before him and who was coming after -- might make a difference. I haven't thought about --

Yes, that's partly in terms of content because [crosstalk] --

That's right, that's right.

Should he be talking about legal issues in relation to death and dying, and might that be covered in the session on legal issues.

But I haven't thought about this thing.

And what about -- what did we learn about ageing? Because that's the kind of core of this and maybe what did we learn about ageing well?

We have similar fears.

Yes. And on the flipchart, it was interesting how very level the positive feelings were to the

negative ones.

And how many there were of each, yes.

Yes.

I think there were more negatives...

Yes, they raise their head in the negative side, and then we caught up --

It's a easier time in there, we have invested -- we have lots more negatives first of all, that are easy to identify as part of our --

That the preconception of older people often is oh, they are very negative. And it's lovely to see that there are so many positive thoughts as well. I think it's great.

Yes, yes.

Younger people can be negative as well because my grandson wasn't feeling well last week. He's fourteen. -- and he is lying on the bed. So I went do you want a drink and he said he was okay. Went to up again you want anything? no, no. And then his mom came in and he came down the stairs and he says "Grandma is driving me mad." He says I am 14; doesn't she think I can do things myself? So, you know, I was trying my best...

Well, he obviously needs a different love language, doesn't he?

Yeah, that's right. So it was quite hard ... I just found it quite funny really.

So I think one of the things we have to talk about is about receiving help. How does it feel to be looked after and --

Yeah, yeah.

Protected, yeah.

People have the fear of losing their independence. Fourteen, it's -- independence is a pretty precarious thing, isn't it? Newly... you are still trying to assert it --

I was just thinking that the older we get, the more dependent we can become. Most of the people, in fact, all the people within the group are all walking. When you think you can get into your 80s and 90s, and be immobilized by various ailments and things like that, you become more dependent on other people to help you at that point in time. I was just thinking -
-

But you can still mentally be positive I should hope.

That's right, but you have to start thinking differently --

That is probably more --

-- to meeting those challenges, yeah.

And one of the things we were touching on is about receiving help. And I think whereas people begin to enter into that more dependent stage, you know, that's when they actually need to start receiving help. And it's quite hard... perhaps that's a skill you have to learn early on, how to -- you know, the graciousness of receiving help. It's interesting that on our table that the risk that J shared was about the risk of having a carer.

Yes.

-- that she had taken. You know, it is a risk, isn't it?

Yeah.

You have to kind of make yourself dependent ; you have trust that person, you are in a vulnerable situation, someone who is not a member of the family coming into the home.

And coming from J, who is very positive about her illness. So if you're not positive about, it must be more difficult.

Yeah, sure.

Yes, it's quite good actually that that was an example that got shared back into the group. I think that was the sort of the group at its best. An example of kind of hope and good practice is shared around the whole group. Because I was all ready to come and say, J, you don't have to share that's quite personal. But she was very willing to do that.

And that might be one of the most important things because on our table, the fear on one of our cards -- look liked your handwriting: Alzheimer's; and it was definitely the foremost fear on our table. And for someone like Jacqui to talk openly, it must give hope to lots of the rest of us sitting around.

Yes.

I would like to press you about some of the harder questions here. You were saying the bottom two questions on these sheets. What we learn about the community and the church, and we learn about God. As we mentioned, that's the harder bit to fill in. So it might be helpful to talk about these things together, I mean, talk about that as a group. What about what we've learnt about community and the church. Does anyone want to share anything from that?

I'd put that we all need other people in some way or other and cannot live well in isolation.

Umm.

And I got on my soapbox again about strangers. I really feel quite strongly about it, and

must not give up on talking to strangers, in my opinion, because when I moved up to Birmingham, every one of you was a stranger. And if we don't talk to strangers and -- it just joins us altogether if you talk to everybody else.

Uhm.

And a stranger today might be a friend of tomorrow.

Well, it has been.

So I'd put down as good supportive connections going on because obviously between last week's session and this week's session, there was some discussion and support for each other. And that was quite important as well, about development. I think the relationships were already there, but it's actually taken the relationships a step further.

That's an interesting spin-off of the course; people being in the same room, talking about the same things, they never had to talk to each other about that before because they know the other one was here, and they see them on another occasion and that's really helpful actually.

Yes, I think that's interesting in that kind of -- inasmuch as it takes the church community or a chunk of the church community, then puts them in a different conversation or different place. And I think... that's been quite interesting for me to watch from the outside.

It's certainly asked questions of people that they haven't looked at in the kind of depth that they may have looked at it individually, but not as a group. And so I think that's certainly sparked.

And I find it fascinating that it's you could almost say it's a church group, you know: it's led by the vicar; it's been organized by the Center; most of the people here are church people. And so there's room for all of those relationships to kind of go on supporting each other. And yet it perfectly well holds people who don't have anything to do with church. So it may kind of feel -- I mean, they honestly feel that they're fully part of the group, don't they.

Yes.

Yes, absolutely.

There is no hesitation about contributing or taking part.

And that's very nice to see those, those open edges of the church community in that sense, where the people can come in to this space which is -- although it's not entirely neutral space; is it? I mean, it is very much linked with the church, even though it's the community center, it's...

And it's development of caring... I came in and one lady, I can't remember who now, straight away she came up to me and said "Are you alright? I was worried about you..."

Yes.

Was that Grace?

Grace, that's right. And I thought that was really nice.

Yeah. Grace feels part of the group.

Grace was here for the second time, wasn't she?

Yeah.

How did she get it, who did she know?

Me and F...

Okay. Because one of the things that Susan was saying, I think, was that Grace had found last week quite heavy. She wasn't sure actually, Susan, that Grace would come back.

Grace is quite a strong Christian lady anyway.

Yeah, that's good. Well, I did reassure Susan that everybody that's here, is sort of connected pastorally as well.

And what was nice as well, is I had an email from Chris apologizing for not being able to come today. So the fact that he'd contacted me to say I am sorry, I am not going to make it. But I will be back.

Yeah.

What about this -- what about our theological reflections, as it were? What did we learnt about God. What associations did we make?

I think it's importance really that as a Christian, the business of feeling safe is, erm, don't know how to describe it... -- with God there as well, you've got that sort of protection around you anyway. Which in a sense kind of enables you to kind of overcome your fears a lot more easily. You can actually talk to him about, you know, deal with it that way.

So a sense of protection, a way of processing the fears through the praying to God and, in a way, that giving you a sense of safety.

Yeah. So you can -- He enables you to go and take those risks.

Which enables you to take risks.

He's our safety net --

The safety net. So God as safety net.

And he provided a good risk-taker in Jesus.

Who always seemed to have the right word at the right time.

Made me think about trusting in God.

Yes.

The quotation which I can't remember the ending of. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and – is it, let not...

Do not rely on your own understanding...

Own understanding or something like that, isn't it --

I mean, the word faith -- or the word for faith, we often translate as sort of believe could equally mean trust. I think believe and trust are, really, good ways of translating the same word from the Bible. It feels quite a different thing, to say, you know, I believe in God or to say I trust in God. You know, in English, they are quite different.

But we never think of this as a risk. Do we?

To trust in God?

Uh-huh.

I think some people think of it as a risk.

Yeah, it's a leap of faith --

A leap of faith --

What's the end of that quote? I just can't quite get it by --

We are talking across each other. What did you think it was now?

Sorry?

What was the quote?

It wasn't the one I was thinking.

And do not rely on your own understanding.

Yeah, that is the one.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your path.

Your path, yeah.

Proverbs 3

Thank you.

Yeah. So is there anything else that anyone would like to reflect on that came out in today's session for them?

I don't know for myself whether the technicalities of the way the session was sort of planned worked as well as it should have or could have done. Of all the four sessions we've done so far, this would be the one. And I think we need to look at the content again --

I thought it was a bit thin on content...

The cards, sort of, both add something and take something away. J, you said you ended up with a bunch of goals that were almost the same.

Yeah, like I said, virtually the same thing apart of the one flying one, and were all similar. So it was difficult to --

Yes. Stimulate...

to find things to say --

And we had one that was sort of like complex and one that was very, very abstract, that sort of left. And that only really left us two to play with.

I got my own back.

excellent

The possible thing to do in that situation is to have five or six other cards all written prepared with things on which are actually quite tricky.

Yes.

And you just slip those in.

Yeah.

Yeah, there wasn't enough meat really in what we'd got.

Well, I wondered whether we actually in the future you should run it with a set of cards. So you, you know, you make sure that you could have Alzheimer's, for example, on each table, and people could chose that if they wanted to.

This was about a fear, was it?

Yeah

Although it is useful, having peoples', because at least you have an idea of where the group is at. In terms of what they share.

Yes,

In terms of what -- so a mix of the two

Yes, you could do that, yeah. Yeah, that would work fine -- anyway, I mean, whoever runs it in the future, whether it is us or somebody else, they can..

...take it their way.

Review it, a bit. And one comment said -- it's not what I thought it would be about. This one was quite good -- we could have been asked ways in which we keep safe.

They mean fire, alarm systems. One thought with more about safety as if it was alarm systems or something.

Yes. I think we did -- I mean, the way that I'd structured it didn't allow it to go in that direction at all. Whereas we could have -- as J said, if it was a bit thin, we could have added that in. I don't know what you think really. But hopefully, we might get it to run again.

P, is there anything else that you wanted to cover?

No, I am happy just for you to carry on -- I mean, we think covered the ground...

Pretty much, yes.

Shall we stop for the day?

Sorry?

Shall we stop it there and then you could assign a few things for next time.

Well, probably the main thing is that F and I had a conversation.

So you had talks as -- I mean, I need to ...

Yes, email me or phone me or something.

Yes.

In that case, I will stop the recording now, and then we can -- you can carry on informally.

Appendix 10. Collated Research Group Reflections from the Ageing Well Course – Complete 8 weeks

How do I feel after today's session?

Week 1

Pleased, stimulated by the contributions of the group

Very buoyant. Optimistic whole course will go well.

Relaxed but hesitant on group sessions

Quite happy with the way it went. Not much (if any) factual content. Good interaction. Too hot.

V. positive. Frustrated by technology failure – though OK. Pleased at how many people came. Lots of laughter. Room slightly frustrating – sound and space

Startled. Esp by the weight and burden people ready to share. A little tired.

Week 2

It was much calmer; everything worked; the logistics were better sorted.

Lots of talking – harder to keep people on track

Doreen especially voiced some tough questions – felt she was being a bit negative

Much more positive

The session went well. I feel quite positive – may try out something new

Relieved that my leading session are over! But it went well with lot of conversing

I think it went fairly well with lots of suggestions of activities that people could do if they felt inclined

Pleased with kind of interaction and ideas generated

Happy people returned to second week. Hopeful most will come for complete course

Week 3

Happier than when I started, particularly as it proved more challenging to participants

Very positive. The group seems to have gelled and everyone seemed comfortable with each other

Drained. Very heavy session

A bit drained as it was harder work than previous guiding a small group which found second exercise challenging

Uplifted and invigorated. There was a lot of sharing at quite a deep level. Very thought provoking.

Positive

Week 4

Ok. The cards we had on our table had very similar fears on them so it made it more difficult for the discussion sessions.

Frustrated. I think a lot of little things could have gone slightly better. I don't think the table groups were big enough. I don't think the cards worked.

Satisfied with a well run session, particularly the confidence of other members of the team in presenting. Encouraged by level of participation on group.

Relieved! Unsure as to whether the card system worked as well as expected. Seemed to be covering same ground repeatedly.

Upbeat. Conversation flowed. My table people were willing to make suggestions.

Calm. Pleased. It seemed quieter

Week 5

Very satisfied. Felt the content was sufficient, the audience were not bored. And questions were related.

Enlightened by some of the input by Ian and the members of the group. Delighted with my "piggy bank"

Fine. I was worried about an outside speaker that none of us knew. I was slightly unsure about the change of session format but it was fine. Plenty of questions at the end.

Very informative. Speakers very amiable.

Good, but realising that we have no idea what the future may hold for us as it can change drastically in a matter of hours if we have a sudden illness etc.

Positive. Different style and group dynamic. Good information, questions and engagement. The activity at the end changed the atmosphere and it was a good counterpoint to the input. Did we need a warm up?

Week 6

It was a difficult topic handled very well. I do not have a problem discussing this subject

Very vulnerable

Mixed. Feedback intriguing. Session delivered slightly strangely. Would like it to be more carefully structured and clearer instructions.

Tired with lots of brain exercise – very stimulating session

Strangely disconnected – having not planned much, led much, sat at a table, and been 10 minutes late.

Unsure about whether the session went well or badly for me. Thought I struggled somewhat with the concept of a ‘good death’. Also we virtually got through the session without mentioning God.

Week 7

Pretty good actually. Thought the whole session worked well. Speaker was good, topic covered extremely well and interaction was good.

Very informative. Excellent presentation. I feel I’ve learned a lot about a complex subject and others have too.

Suddenly realise I am at “that age”!

Positive. Interesting and useful session. Good introduction to the ideas.

Good session – clarified some issues about LPAs well. Good to participate rather than lead part of session.

Positive. It went well – I could feel people’s confidence in Jenny. It made me think about my having power of attorney for my aunt.

Week 8

Good, satisfied with interaction in small group and how it fed into large group session. The pattern / spiral of whole series culminated in a very relaxed and informative session.

The session was confidently and most competently led by Miriam who answered all of the questions that she had time for very clearly.

I feel really positive

Very satisfied that we have completed the course successfully. Dr Miriam conducted this session in a friendly but professional way.

Positive

Very positive. It was a very good atmosphere. Good attendance, though late start due to the election and use of car park. I thought the “how you can help us to help you” section was especially good.

Ageing Well Reflections Collated: What did I learn about ageing?

Week 1

Vulnerability of single people created more difficulties

People are determined to be positive and keep trying

That it's no deterrent to living life to the full – it may present problems but that they can be faced and accepted and coped with.

It has many different challenges. You are never too old to learn something new (flying, new language, coping on your own, etc)

Challenges and how deal with: accommodation (adapt and accept; looking at others); Humour (gives perspective); Live through on as best can for each crisis (intractable): one size doesn't fit all.

Things can be demoralizing – repeated bereavements. Time to reflect can bring new challenges

Week 2

Challenge and choices

Importance of physical and mental activity

Difficulties in participating (fears)

Balance and basic fitness can make a big difference to freedom and independence

Focus on activity sometimes misses the point... what is the purpose of activity (Doreen's point)?

It can be positive thing if you let it be

How it doesn't stop you doing what you want

You need to keep fit both mentally and physically to ward off sign of old age

Broader understanding of fears which prevent people trying new activities

Age is a state of mind, not a number

Week 3

That relationships are still possible and worthy of involvement and renewal. Ageing does not diminish the possibility of starting new relationship at anytime

Friendships are valuable and making new friends could impact on existing relationships if you allow them too

We do not want any interference in our own way of life. Enrichment, YES

People have more relationships gathered through life so more wary of entering into new ones

That we are never too old to form new relationships or to re-evaluate existing relationships. We want our lives enriching not interfering with.

People may value existing relationships over the idea of forming new relationships

Week 4

We have similar fears. We have a fear of losing our independence as we grow older.

Lots of positives and negatives about being protected. Open fear of Alzheimer's

Risks and fears continue throughout life and make life always challenging and interesting.

We can become more dependent on other people to help us as we grow older.

Equal amount of positive feelings to negative ones.

Fear of taking risks, fear of unknown can stop us trying new things but this can apply to almost any age.

Week 5

The same approach to money continues as in younger life – e.g. budgeting. Just that the amount of income is lower and expenditure goes on different things. There are many benefits to being older though in monetary terms e.g. free bus passes, fuel allowance, etc.

Some older people struggle with modern technology which seems to be inconsiderate of non-tech people.

Retirement can last 30+ years... get an MOT every five years. Can't easily trust e.g. internet banking

We all seem to have similar queries and same problems, young or old.

We do need to act responsibly and budget for our futures. That people on a small income or pension are entitled to pension credits and should not be too proud to claim them.

Emphasis on planning to reduce stress and worry. Talking to others for help e.g. agencies like Age UK, peer group. The importance of thrift for present generation of older people.

Week 6

Generally as people get older they are more aware of their own mortality and many want to discuss aspects around death with their loved ones.

Nothing. Death can come at any age

Haunted by whole of life. Ageing and death linked by not synonymous. Humour and metaphor.

Lots of similar ideas about dying and death which are more a focus as one gets older. How topic death and dying can be diverted by humour yet how useful it is to discuss

Is ageing a moment when one knows oneself closer to death and it cannot be denied? Questions about honesty and facing hard stuff – place of humour and euphemism.

Brings you a step nearer death but doesn't really have a bearing on whether you have a good death or not. Death comes whether we are old or young.

Week 7

How to look forward to mental incapacity! Really, though, ageing does bring problems that have to be dealt with appropriately and sooner rather than later.

It can sometimes be a very sad time and unscrupulous people may take advantage of your frailty / incapacity. It is even harder to bear when these people are so called 'loved ones.'

It is never too early to write a will or power of attorney. Very positive that there is so much in place for people to make things easier for themselves.

Plan ahead. Can be expensive – and for 'maintenance' reasons.

How family relationships can become more stressful if wills or LPAs not done earlier. Need to do these when younger.

The presumption of capacity in assessing someone's mental capacity. The importance of making these decisions before the need is urgent.

Week 8

Amazing how many pills older people take past 75! Does that mean we need more medication as we get older?

There is no escaping old age! As a group we were quite fit as very few of us were taking medication. We can all expect some health issues as we get older.

Older people can be in control of their own health and their GP consultations.

That there are so many drugs available to keep us alive.

Being a role model to professionals.

Older people can be role models for others in how to live and die well – and how to age well. Important to be able to stand up without using hands!

Ageing Well Reflections Collated: What did I learn about myself?

Week 1

Can still lead part of session – though forgot timing. Enjoyed drawing others into discussion in small groups

I was part of an interesting age group

That I need to relearn about leading groups

I don't like to talk about my illness

Excitement about project: adrenalin was going – sense of excitement. So pleased people came (18) (feels hopeful – might work – good it's started)

I like cupcakes. I work quite hard to get everyone's voice heard... People focussed rather than task focussed.

Week 2

Find it hard to sit back – hard not to interfere so as to keep to the point

There's quite a lot in this world I want to do (from the exercises)

I tend to be a leader in small groups but nervous in larger groups. Sometimes I talk too much and tend to take over I need to address this.

That I am able to lead a session even some years after having done it before

I performed poorly. I was tired at the part of the session I was summarising and a bit deflated by the negative comments

More able to bring in amusing anecdotes than previous teaching experience

Pleased I could stand up and take a segment of session

Week 3

I can still do things spontaneously without fear. I've never really thought about 'value' in relationships before but it has been such a positive exercise both before and during the session. Affirmation

I feel uncomfortable leading a group. As with most of the group I found it difficult to think about my own qualities. Although I come across as confident, in some areas I am quite insecure

What I already knew. My children and family are hugely important to me

Still able to think on my feet to guide a small and large group discussions. Also able to draw on religious reference to stimulate discussion / reflection when asked for it.

That I should value myself and that other people value me in ways I didn't realise. We don't know what people are thinking about us. My family, children and grandchild are very important to me

Same things as always – that I want things to be perfect and I am not very good at small talk.

Week 4

That overcoming fear e.g. driving again, is well worth the risk

I found it frustrating not to be able to tweak the session mid-flow. I found I'd left the session guide a bit vague. "Fear of not being able to trust a stranger. Woeful world if we can't."

Not ready to try gliding yet. Good memories of risk taking.

That even when I'm thrown into doing something unprepared I can do it and make a good job of it.

I certainly don't want to stop taking risks. It makes life so much more interesting.

Sometimes it is the small fears that diminish my life rather than the big things which might seem more dramatic.

Week 5

As an accountant by profession it's nice to know I'm following in tried and tested principles in keeping to a budget.

Nice to sit back and have input provided by others. Fairly knowledgeable about finances – session filled in some useful gaps.

Prefer to be relying on people I know and understand

More willing to get involved.

That I should check my budget more frequently

Should I have a funeral plan? Should I do a budget? I don't like budgeting

Week 6

My views were very similar to others. Talking about death does not bother me.

Still uncertain about my thoughts on dying.

I always learn the same things when I'm leading or supporting a group though I'm not sure what it is

Easier to talk about concepts such as good death and what I might want to be remembered for.

I'm not sure how much I've actually really faced the reality of my own death. When thinking about what a good death means to me I wrote down 'Hopes fulfilled.' I don't fear death when I just talk now, but things like making a will or planning my funeral, make me stop.

That however much I am able to talk about death yet there is still a lurking fear of it even though I know that as a Christian there is no need to.

Week 7

That I need to consider doing an LPA for myself.

I am getting better at keeping a small group focused – easier to bring them back to the subject rather than digressing onto something irrelevant. Made me think about my family's needs.

That it is my duty to make things clear for my children.

Reflecting on my family "health" – who would I look to in the future.

Importance of being proactive. Glad the process over LPA for relatives has made us do ours.

I realise this is not something I am thinking about for myself. Humbling to know I have been trusted by my aunt with this responsibility.

Week 8

Able to condense ideas into suitable questions to set speaker. Need to stand on one leg more for improving balance.

I am quite fortunate to be fit and active and confident in my own GP.

That I shouldn't feel guilty when I have to make a regular appointment with my GP.

I am glad NHS outsources services. Sorry, political!

[blank]

I am very fortunate to enjoy good health. Whilst I have an awareness of beginning to age, I don't worry about health or accessing good health care.

Ageing Well Reflections Collated: What did I learn about others?

Week 1

Lots of things I didn't know about in individuals I have known for many years; optimistic view of ageing despite difficulties.

Very optimistic, humorous, willing to chat

Many fascinating things about their lives and challenges that many face.

Lots of facts from the group (experiences) on my table and from others. A willingness to share and a sense of fun.

Saw other side of people e.g. June ; humour; resilience impressed me. Benefit of working as a team. Impressed by the leaders.

It struck me how collaborative the group is and calm. It was interesting to see that many people came in pairs.

Week 2

People have different attitudes and approaches – positive outlook is much more enabling

A lot of energy and appetite to do things. Sometimes quite simple blockages are the difference between doing something and not doing it.

People who I thought were very positive turned out to be quite negative which I thought was very sad

How different we all are. Some people are highly engaged in activities whilst others are doing little. Is it just the motivated ones that come to this group?

Some people have very strong opinions and can be quite negative

Good participation by other members of the group both enablers and others

Most optimistic about age. Few haven't adapted.

Week 3

Affirmation. The struggles that people go through in relationships – how usually we don't value ourselves.

How difficult people find it to value themselves

Some others felt [the] same, no interference... However, some lacked companionship

Need to sow a few seeds for some quieter, introspective members to take away with them

That everyone is of value in many different ways. We all have relationships that we may like to develop

That social connections can be very thin. That people seem to need different amounts of friendship.

Week 4

Other people have similar fears to mine. We all take risks everyday in some way or other. And we have to trust other people in our daily lives whether we like it or not.

I saw Felicity's confidence and competence in preparing. Frank's, Donald's and Joan's different clarities each having a place.

Wide range of experiences in fears and risk-taking. Some of quieter members said more in large groups which is encouraging.

Most of us face similar fears throughout the day. But it is harder for some folk to deal with those same predicaments.

Variety of fears and variety of reactions

Week 5

The same questions apply to other people as well as myself in regard to things like funeral plans, environmental installations. But there are stresses with those who have lower incomes.

Lot of experiences shared by others in their questions/comments about finances. Making 'piggy banks' was a good co-operative exercise to finish with.

'Most people worry about money'. Funeral planning is a complex and disappointingly worrying area for some.

Willing to ask questions and join in. People feeling more relaxed.

Our financial circumstances are very different resulting from our career pensions as well as state pension.

People loved the craft activity! Many different attitudes to benefits, pension credit, saving, thrift etc.

Week 6

I was surprised how open those that attended were with talking about death and dying

I did not think anyone was relaxed about the subject

What they look like in 1:1 is not what they look like, necessarily, in a group. Bereavement lasts forever. Using silence to reflect.

How losses in early life impact on people in later life – they may be covered over but can still be brought in mind when talking about death and dying.

Concern for order – leaving things in good order when they die. Legacy.

[blank]

Week 7

As we get older there are many and various thoughts about relationship problems with families that need to be anticipated earlier rather than later.

Even though step families may get on well, for some there can be definite rift when certain situations arise. Not everyone cares about others.

Everyone seemed very engaged with the subject. Speaker good.

'Always a noisy one who comes forward' – probably not the one you want. Make better decisions in better settings. People can want to do good and yet do harm (Leo).

Reluctance by some to face LPA process. Hard to accept may be necessary to do before capacity goes.

Jacqui saying, "I've already got mine sorted out." and June saying, "I'll have to do something about this"; both very important statements.

Week 8

People's feelings both good and bad about GPs and health issues

Some older people take lots of medication to keep well.

We had similar questions, thoughts, etc regarding health

There are some very fit elderly people. Popular session. Elderly concerned about health.

Need time to settle into an issue or idea... often by talking aloud. Need to be reminded that their lives are their lives first and foremost... that they can govern their process through a system.

Majority of people over 75 take more than 4 different sets of pills.

Ageing Well Reflections Collated: What did I learn about community and the church?

Week 1

Good networks in church supporting each other in practical and emotional ways. Some different views of wider community – not so friendly in some areas.

Most people experience similar challenges.

[blank]

The group from church conversed naturally as some were friends which encouraged others to share their experiences

Importance and value of being together and sharing

It was interesting to see people who know each other from church talk about faith in a secular setting. I learnt there are no mirrors in the church toilet.

Week 2

Importance of welcome. Importance of not being exclusive. The social side of physical activities is just as important. There is lots going on in our community

There is a challenge in maximising the possibilities even in a group as dynamic as this one

The people on my table all belonged to a church and were very comfortable with their own communities. I think that was positive in meeting with new people.

There's a lot going on in the community which you can get involved in. And the church needs to be involved more and more with older folk.

The church community is strong and open. The community of Bournville has lots of positive advantages and there are lots of activities

Wide range of activities available in the local community. No University of the 3rd Age activities in Bournville

Very open to chat about ideas.

Week 3

There are so many things going on in the community for involvement

More activities going on in the area than I was aware of.

Helps with people who want companionship.

Lots more activities going on around locality

Lots of activities going on in the local community and in the church

Lots of resource and willingness to reflect – lot of mutual affection and trust

Week 4

We all need other people in some way or other and cannot live will in isolation

Very polite. People know each other well.

Those uncertain about the course willing to make space for it to unfold.

Relationship between majority church membership and minority non-church.

Good supportive conversations going on after session between members which shows community spirit is high.

Don't stop helping strangers

Importance of trust in others for society / community

Week 5

What can the church do to help the community following the closure of the bank or post office?

Very useful contact in Age UK

Interesting about funerals and dilemmas for vicars in having set fees to charge by diocese

Interesting to hear a non-church speaker urging the importance of community

This course organised by the church has been very helpful for us and community

It is very difficult to be buried in a church yard.

People are going to miss our local bank. Places like church and community centres vital for bringing people together.

Week 6

People seem to get a lot of support from friends and others in the community.

The church is a very good bridge between life and death

Easier to do a funeral for someone you don't know...

Less respect for the dead by general public e.g. reaction to hearses. How religion is important consideration in death and dying.

There are rich resources of skills and wisdom to be drawn upon

[blank]

Week 7

What legacy are we leaving for those coming after?

[blank]

There can be trouble between families when money is involved.

Wondered about the role of the church in family conflict.

How important was mental capacity act in ensuring some protection and rights for us all when vulnerable through disability.

The process of preparing LPAs and Wills is a really important community service. Resisting the temptation to think it is something the church should provide, but it can draw on the expertise of others.

Week 8

More informed about outsourcing of health services in local community. Confirms that people with strong faith [are] fitter and living more healthily.

We are fortunate to have Miriam as a member of our church.

How important it is for the church to reach out to the community with courses such as Ageing Well – Christians and non-Christians working together for the common good.

[blank]

Interesting that a GP sees it as a place where we should talk about critical issues.

Key role of GPs in local community. Can we do more with this help us to help you approach?

Ageing Well Reflections Collated: What did I learn about God?

Week 1

Acts as a good source of support for some people when they pray.

He was watching over us during meeting.

That He is able and faithful even when I feel hesitant

He loves us all warts & all & never stops caring for us. Footprints quote.

Thinking about what wisdom is.

I learnt that lots of priests lose their faith when they retire!

Week 2

The theological question that came out was about 'what is the point?' Part of Donald's response was to quote "Love your neighbour as yourself".

He calls people to fulfil their call even in older age (Doreen again)

The importance of God in some peoples' lives

That he will provide all that's needed, especially when it comes to leading a session!

God has given me a second chance of life after my illness and now I am grateful for each and every day and the challenges it brings. Love your neighbour as yourself; you must love yourself to love your neighbour.

By trusting in him, things go well

He sent Sue to boost my confidence!

Week 3

?

God is with us and supporting us even when we're not aware of it

He's made us very individual under a common interest

Can be a channel for him, if I allow it. Microcosm of creation

That God supports and upholds us when times are difficult

Not sure

Week 4

It made me think about trusting God. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and in all your ways and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3)

He is always there somewhere. Nothingness

God provided good risk taker in Jesus. He always seemed to know the right thing to say in tricky situations.

I can do all things in Him! And as a Christian I believe in his protection through my fears.

I don't think Health and Safety should come before compassion from God.

Security / confidence that comes from trust at the deepest level. Trust in life / creation itself.

Week 5

How grateful to God that I have enough to live on and do what I need to.

God knows our needs before we ask but we have difficulty asking others to help us.

I think he enjoys us being together in a group, helping each other.

He cares for us all equally regardless of our individual circumstances

“Man shall not live by bread alone” – but by cakes as well! Theological reflection needed on themes of providence and stewardship. Giving and ethical investment.

Week 6

Very much with us today. One lady, who said she was a non-Christian said she lives her life along Christian values.

That I need his guidance over the matter of dying.

You can spend your whole life trying to serve him, only to find out you’re serving yourself... but God doesn’t let that matter.

A reassuring presence in considering death and dying

The concept of life and creation as a ‘Living web’. To you I come, my joy, my home (Brian Wren hymn). Can we trust enough to let go?

Thank goodness He knows when I will die and I am to live this life with eternity in mind.

Week 7

God has put us in families and we are stuck with what we have. And have to deal with problems surrounding.

We should put others before ourselves. Put things in place when you are able.

[blank]

‘When you are old people will lead you where you do not wish to go.’ [John 21.18] We are always preparing for an end-time. Thinking about money so much it distorts our conduct.

God want us to think of our relatives before they may have to make decisions for us. So some self-action will help other in our lives.

LPA is an act of trusting in a world when trust cannot be taken for granted. Faith is all about trust. God be in my trusting.

Week 8

God provides lot of resources in the church and community through speakers on key issues.

God cares for us all and enables people with gifts of healing to care for us.

[blank]

He loves us wards & all.

Something was very gracious about Miriam’s vision of older people showing GPs how to live.

Importance of embracing our vulnerability, frailty, fallibility and bearing with one another for love’s sake. Doctors are ministers of healing but are not divine.

Appendix 11.

Ageing Well in Bournville

Facilitator's Report

The Ageing Well in Bournville course, funded by Awards for All, achieved two things.

First, it delivered a **practical, eight-session course on different aspects of ageing**, in a positive, empowering way. The course was well attended, and well delivered. We collected feedback at the end of each session and at the end of the whole course, which suggested that it had been well received.

Secondly, it empowered **a group of people over the age of 55 to shape and lead the course** themselves. This was always its intention. From the outset we realised that we had an opportunity to do something that we really believed in – namely, give people the space to forge their own initiative to create community amongst older people in the locality.

Course Format

The course offered eight 1.5 hour sessions, each on a different topic. The course outline was developed by the host team (see below) from some action research done by the Vicar of St Francis Bournville, who had a key role in developing the course and was also a member of the host team. The course outline emerged from an early meeting of the host team:

Week 1	<i>New steps and challenges</i>
Week 2	<i>Keeping mentally and physically active</i>
Week 3	<i>New and existing relationships</i>
Week 4	<i>Feeling safe, keeping safe</i>
Easter break	
Week 5	<i>Money Matters*</i>
Week 6	<i>Death and Dying *</i>
Week 7	<i>Legal issues *</i>
Week 8	<i>Your health and the health services *</i>

*sessions marked with an asterisk had an outside speaker

How the course was led

Prior to each session, a team of seven of us met to plan. Five were people from the local community; one was the vicar; one was myself, as a commissioned facilitator. We described ourselves as the course **hosts** – to avoid an identity as trainers and to emphasise a

role of welcoming and ensuring accessibility. The host team met after each session to review it.

We led the first four sessions ourselves, with various members of the host team leading different exercises with in each of the sessions. All members of the host team took on this role at some point. As there were many connections between the host team and the course participants, sometimes the latter observed and supported the former as they took on a new challenge. For example, here is one line from a feedback form:

Group was well led. Well done, Felicity, I know you were nervous but it didn't show!

We planned exercises carefully and distributed tasks so that we all knew what our role was at any given time. The course was delivered in a 'cabaret-style' layout. It was attended on average by twelve people, with the maximum recorded attendance being 16 (in weeks three and eight).



Three table groups at work during the course

All hosts had a continual role throughout all eight sessions, because they were distributed around the tables. This meant that we didn't need to worry about how small group tasks were being interpreted by participants, and the course could flow quite quickly. It also meant that the host team had a really good pastoral overview of all course members, which became important as some of the course topics were potentially challenging and unnerving. From the outset, members of the host team took initiative above and beyond any perceived 'requirements', for example contacting visiting speakers, baking cakes for hospitality at the course, inviting friends to be course participants.

The course programme above shows a course made of eight sessions (which were broken midway by an Easter break), where the first four were led by the host team, and the second four in which outside speakers were instrumental. This pattern emerged more by accident than design, but it worked well. The second four sessions, around some difficult concrete issues, were delivered to a group that had already explored hopes and possibilities, had bonded, and which trusted the host team that was travelling with it. That meant that when a difficult session occurred, we were able to maintain confidence.

Series is turning out much more interesting and helpful than I expected. I hope it will be

The Host Team

The host group was mutually supportive. This soon led people to take on new roles, or to breathe a new kind of life into skills they already had (one ex-primary school teacher reflected on leading a group of a very different age).

As commissioned trainer, I regarded myself as a kind of goalkeeper. Knowing – or at least believing - that I could pick up anything that got past the rest of the team, I aimed to be a reassuring and occasionally co-ordinating presence. It was my task to step into any role that really was regarded as too complex or unnerving by others, but at the end of the day there were very few such tasks. My main task in the group turned out to be making initial proposals on how each session would run. I was pleased that other members of the host team were willing to make counter-proposals, and to openly evaluate the activities after the session. I was especially pleased that I was not called upon to stand and speak in front of the whole group until Week Four, except for one moment when the person opening the session was unavoidably delayed.

The Role of St Francis Church

Building community is a demanding task; the kind that requires the best use of existing resources. In this case, one important resource was the local parish church. Through the

Yes, feel more positive this week – risks are worth taking.

parish priest who commissioned the course, St Francis Bournville provided us with all members of our host team and many, though not all, of the

course participants. There were new and old relationships: at least one member of the host team was a new arrival at St Francis.

It's important to realise that this is not as 'cosy' as it might sound. Churches are places where some people may be extremely engaged and well connected, while others appear briefly each Sunday, their names hardly known to those around them. Especially in urban settings, churches may create the potential for community, rather than community itself. This course built on that potential

Furthermore, the Ageing Well in Bournville course was, naturally, quite different from church. It had a different purpose, different manner of speech, and gathered at a different location and time.

The advantages of using St Francis as a springboard were:

- Good connections to support the course – some of the guest speakers were members of the church community, for example
- Pastoral habits – people in the host team and some amongst the course participants were naturally shaped in looking out for and caring about others. I felt there was less work to do in forming the co-leader team than I had expected
- Trust: as one person said in their feedback, after session one:

Most of this morning's work would not have been so effective if those on our table had not known each other for many years.

This comment needs holding on to carefully. It may be that future courses, which reach further from the church community, will demand a higher level of attention when discussion on difficult subjects is opened up.

While there seemed to be no disadvantages with using St Francis Bournville as a springboard on this course, there are some cautions to hold onto:

- As noted above, future courses may begin with a group of people for whom trust needs to be built up more carefully and slowly.
- Christian practice ought to be welcoming and hospitable, but some strains of the faith have not achieved this. As a result, churches can have a reputation for being frosty or judgmental places, and some people may be nervous about attending a course associated with the local church.

Evaluation

The course was evaluated in the following ways:

- Post-session evaluation
After each of the eight sessions, course participants were asked to rate aspects of the course on a simple feedback form. Results were collated and any extra comments were noted and discussed immediately afterwards by the host team.

The screenshot shows a feedback form with the following content:

- Header: St Francis Bournville: Ageing Better in Bournville
- Section: Your feedback
- Question 1: The topic covered. (4 yellow smiley face icons)
- Question 2: How the group was led. (4 yellow smiley face icons)
- Question 3: Guest speakers (if any). (4 yellow smiley face icons)
- Question 4: The venue - comfort, sound etc. (4 yellow smiley face icons)
- Question 5: Would you recommend today's session to someone else? (4 yellow smiley face icons)
- Text input field: Other comments:

- Post-session review

Each week, the host team met immediately after the session to review it together. This review typically took between 60-90 minutes and was an important part of our formation as a team. We began by reflecting individually asking ourselves what we had learnt about ourselves, humanity and community – not always easy questions to respond to! We then explored the responses together and in doing so reflected on the effectiveness of the session and shared any pastoral concerns, making plans for the following week's session as we went.

- Post course review

We offered a 'Week 9' celebration event and review which was well attended by course members, where we explored in conversation how people had felt about the course, what its potential was, and what further steps could be taken. In doing so we aimed to demonstrate that all those who had participated in the course in any way, had an ongoing stake in the future of the course. Opportunities for further development that appeared at that stage include

- Occasional ongoing activities co-ordinated by one member of the host team
- Repeat course in a different location using some members of the host team
- Informal connections have led to other activities, e.g. one member organised a trip to a glider club, and offered an open invitation to all course members.

Sustainability

This was an exciting project to be part of. It was a practical project with an element of action research. I hope it helps to demonstrate one way in which community and self-care can be intentionally seeded for older people. If so, it will also demonstrate how churches such as St Francis Bournville can remain able to sustain society, even as we move into a new world characterised by an ageing population, in a society which less and less regards itself as Christian.

There are opportunities to repeat the course: we now have a confident team of hosts, with experience in forming and leading the course; and a cohort of people who may act as 'word of mouth' recruiters, or even join the host team in due course. It was always the aim that if the course was well received, it could be replicated within and by the community, with less and less outside facilitation needed.

There are also opportunities for the group that formed at the course to continue on to new activities.

It may be that the course also has an impact on the culture of St Francis church itself, 'giving permission' for people to speak to each other about ageing well, encouraging each other to be positive, in line with the contents of the first four weeks of the course. If so, it would help this church to bring to life once more one of the most well-known Christian injunctions to approach life with 'trust, hope and love' (1 Corinthians 13).

With those three opportunities opening up, it feels like the Ageing Well adventure may only just have begun.

Appendix 12

Word Frequency Query – Results from Merged Transcripts

able activity **actually** aging also always anything back bit came **church**
coming community course death **different** difficult done dying else end even
fears **feel** felt **get** god going **goodness** got **group**
helps ideas important interesting **just** keep kind **knows**
learn life **like** live look **lot** love make many **mean** might much need
next now older **one** others parts **people** person point
positive put questions **quite** **really** reflections relationships **right** saying
seemed sees **session** share somebody **something** sort start table
taking talking terms **things** **think**
thought time today trust trying two using want way weeks
well went whether work **yeah** **yes**

Appendix 13. 'Life Abundantly': Exegesis of John 10:10

A key text for Christian reflection on fullness of life are the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (10:10-11): 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life (*zoen*), and have it abundantly (*perissos*). I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' (NRSV). The translation of the phrase as 'life in all its fullness', is also familiar (e.g. from the GNT).

Locating this text in its biblical context, a possible background is Ezekiel 34 in which the bad shepherds are judged and God promises to come himself to shepherd his own people. The abundance in John 10.10 alludes to the 'plentiful pasture' in Ezek. 34.25-31' (Lindars, 1972, p. 360). Within the context of the gospel itself, this saying is seen by several scholars as a reflection on the story of the man born blind in chapter 9. The blind man is rejected by the leaders and so is excluded from the community; Jesus gives him new life through restoring his sight. On the one hand the Pharisees (the hireling shepherds) fail to care properly for the man born blind and instead cast him out (9.34). On the other hand, Jesus, the good shepherd, finds him (9.35) and brings him in to the true fold (Burrige, 2008, p. 134; Barrett, 1978, p. 367).

This verse can also be seen as an interpretation of Jesus as the gate of the sheepfold in the first part of chapter 10. Jesus is the gate through whom the sheep can go in and out to find pasture. Earlier in the gospel Jesus is seen to supply the living water and the bread of life; now he provides the pasture of life. Verse 10 makes it clear that 'in speaking of pasture, he is really speaking of fullness of life'; this gift of life is in contrast to the slaughter that the thief brings (Brown, 1966, p. 394). In the wider context of the NT, Brown compares verse 10

‘I came that they may have life and have it to the full’ (his translation) with the abundant grace in Rom 5.20 (Brown, 1966, pp. 384-6).

The verb *perisseuein* within the NT is ‘almost always used in contexts which speak of a fullness present and proclaimed in the age of salvation as compared with the old aeon, or of a new standard which is required in this age.’ *Perisseuein* then has an eschatological frame of meaning. Outside the NT it means ‘to be present overabundantly’ (e.g. Xenophon. Sym 4,35). Here in John 10.10, the adjective *perissos* denotes: ‘the superabundance of the blessing of salvation which Christ as distinct from false prophets will give believers’ (Kittle, 1968, pp. 58-9, 62).

The understanding that comes from this passage is that the purpose of the Father’s sending of the Son is to bring about the well-being of God’s people – his flock. The saying echoes other statements in the gospel about the bringing of life (cf. e.g. 3.16; 4.14b; 5.24; 6.33, 40, 51; 11.25). Taking this saying alongside others, and especially John 3.16, it can be said that in John’s gospel the giving of life and being saved are parallel notions. ‘The revelation and salvation Jesus offers entail the positive judgement of life, and the signs of turning water into wine and feeding the five thousand have demonstrated that this life is given in abundance’ (Lincoln, 2005, p. 296). This leads to reflection on the range of meanings of ‘life’ as the other key word in this verse.

Jesus said ‘I came that they may have life (*zoen*), and have it abundantly (*perissos*).’ The Greek word *zoen* translated as life, denotes in classical usage ‘the physical vitality of organic beings, animals, men and also plants. Life is understood, not as a thing, but as vitality, as the nature or manner which characterizes all living creatures as such.’ In the NT

zoen is used of humanity's natural life, the opposite and end of which is to be found in natural death. There is also a sense that *zoen* is realized in 'the ability of what is alive to do things'. *Zoen* is never regarded or investigated as an observable phenomenon, but it is perceived that human life is fulfilled in the manner of leading it; so, with adverbs, it expresses the manner of life. 'To live' can sometimes mean 'to live in health'. What is more, *zoen* is proper to God as the One who has life in himself and who lives eternally and who is the lord and giver of life. (Kittle, 1964, pp. 832-62)

The word *zoen* appears 37 times in John's gospel and has an even more radical meaning in that John's conception of *zoen* is of 'life as present' in the person of Jesus: 'He is life and has life in Himself, not merely as the power of His life as a living creature, but as the creative power of God'; and 'He has come to give life to the world (6.33; 10.10; 1 Jn 4.9)' (Kittle, 1964, p. 870). Right at the beginning of the gospel the writer affirms that 'In him was life' (John 1.4-5), that is: 'God's energizing and life giving power, sustaining created existence in relation to its creator' (Lincoln, 2005, p. 99). Jesus by his miracles, resurrection, and continued power in the supernatural life of the church, proves himself to be the life of the world: Jesus was life and light in himself and he was the agent by whom God bestowed life and light upon the world (Barrett, 1978, p. 158).

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the bestower of life and the signs that Jesus performs attest to his divine agency. The nature of the signs 'underlines the unique status of this agent as the giver of life in abundance, who, in overturning dearth, disease and death, exercises the divine prerogative, particularly that of bestowal of life, and anticipates the positive outcome of the process of judgement in the experience of eternal life'. John

3.16-17 makes clear that the goal of judgement is not condemnation but the 'reversal of alienation and death and the establishment of well-being and life'. So, the word becomes flesh for the purpose of bringing life to humanity; Jesus mission is that of saving the world (3.17) and of giving life to it (6.35, 51). Within the frame of this interpretation John 10.10 can be seen as, in a sense, Jesus' 'mission statement': 'I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance'. This is indeed a theme of the gospel as abundance is not only mentioned in this verse but also, for example, at the wedding at Cana there is the 'symbolism of wine as the abundance Jesus provides for living' (Lincoln, 2005, pp. 61-62, 113, 134).

John 10.10 is therefore to be interpreted in the context of the whole mission of Jesus, the purpose of which is to give (eternal) life to the world which is a fundamental theme throughout John (e.g. 3.16; 20.31). If *perisson* is translated as 'to have abundance, even superfluity' (of life), then a key question is whether that is life now, eternal life, or both (eternal life in the here and now) as the age to come (the Kingdom) breaks into the present (Barrett, 1978, p. 373). In John's gospel, eternal life is equivalent to the Kingdom of God in the synoptic gospels. The life which Jesus bestows has the quality of the age to come and the signs point to this: the first sign of the turning water into wine points to Jesus as 'the divine giver of the abundant life of the new age'; the second sign of healing the child who is near death shows Jesus as the giver of life; the third sign, the healing of the lame man, 'the giving of health and wholeness on the physical level points beyond itself to the offer of eternal life'; at the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus is again 'portrayed as the giver of life in abundance this time through its central symbol of bread' (Lincoln, 2005, pp. 148, 190, 199-200, 216).

The Christological focus of abundance is in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Christ, the Word made flesh, who in his incarnation lives 'the whole range of human life to the full' (Verney, 1985, p. 106); and through the offering of himself makes it possible for others to live the same fullness. This theme is picked up by Vanier (2004, p. 188):

Real shepherds give of themselves freely;
their love and caring communicate life to those who are weaker and immature.

This is why Jesus says:

"I came that the sheep may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep..." vv.10-11

Jesus loves us abundantly and wants to give us
all we need to grow in wisdom
and greater human and spiritual maturity.

The imagery of shepherd, flock and sheep in chapter 10 expresses something the relational, collective and individual nature of salvation and life. All the sheep go in and out through the gate; but the shepherd calls the sheep by name and each one knows his voice and listens to him. The shepherding image is extended at the end of the gospel (John 21.15-19) when Peter is commissioned as an under-shepherd and this has become a key metaphor for the ministry of the church and particularly for priestly ministry (Lincoln, 2005, pp. 301, 518).

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