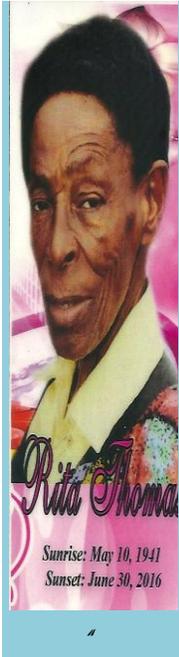


# MINISTERS FORUM NEWSLETTER

## INFORMATION MINISTERS CAN USE

### MINISTERING TO THE ELDERLY GOLDEN-AGERS

**Tribute**  
to Golden Ager  
Sister Rita  
Thomas who  
passed away  
June 30, 2016 at  
age 75 years



Record has shown that Sis Thomas has been the most faithful member of Pentecostal Tabernacle, UPCJ. Even among the Youth she has never been absent from a Youth Camp for the last 40 years. May her soul rest in the arms of Jesus.

*The elderly otherwise called Golden-agers is said to be the most overlooked and even forgotten by a growing segment of society. They are seen by some as not having much to offer hence do not need much attention but they are so wrong. The wonderful thing is that although modern society has neglected the elderly, God hasn't. He desires that His church reach out to these people and minister grace and peace to them. In Proverbs 16:31 we see that God values the elderly - "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." David's cry to God in Psalm 71:9 is that of many elderly people today: "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth."*

The United Nations Resolution, declaring 1999 the *International Year of Older Persons*, and the choice of its theme "Towards a Society for All Ages", is a further confirmation of what the creator desires for people as they age (over which they have no control). A society for all ages is, therefore, a multigenerational society committed to creating the conditions of life able to fulfill the great potential that older people still have.

*"Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth."*

*Psalms 71:9*

The perception of old age as a period of decline, in which human and social inadequacy is taken for granted, is in fact very widespread today and does not take account of the fact that in practice old age is experienced in very different ways. There are those older people who are capable of grasping the significance that old age has in the context of human existence, and who confront it not only with serenity and dignity, but as a time of life which offers them new opportunities for growth and commitment to the church and life in general.

There are however, others to whom old age is a traumatic experience, and who react to their own ageing with attitudes ranging from passive resignation to rebellion, rejection and despair thus accelerating the process of their own physical and mental deterioration. So what can the church do in light of Psalms 71:9 (above), has the church taken time to understand the elderly and effectively minister to them – do we understand what is happening to the mind



of the elderly – do we understand how older people can be coaches and mentors to the next generation. The elderly therefore needs help and can give help.

Psychologist Erik Erikson speaks to the psycho-social development of human beings at different stages of life. He sees the elderly as being ages sixty (60) years and older. He explains that to age sixty-four (64) people are in the stage of Generativity or Stagnation (**Generativity vs. Stagnation**) where the question is usually asked “can I make my life count?”

**Generativity** refers to “making your mark” on the world through caring for others as well as creating and accomplishing things that make the world a better place. It is during this time that adults strive to create or nurture things that will outlast them; often by parenting children or contributing to positive changes that benefit other people. Contributing to society and doing things to benefit future generations are important needs at the generativity versus stagnation stage of development.

Conversely, **Stagnation** refers to the failure to find a way to contribute; individuals may feel disconnected or uninvolved with their church, community and with society as a whole.

Erikson goes on to say that the over 65 year old at this stage of development is in the period when the virtue of wisdom is important and there is Ego Integrity vs. Despair. This is where individuals are reflecting on the life they have lived and the question is often asked - “was it okay to have been me” that is, did I live a meaningful, satisfying life? During this period, people reflect on the life they have lived and come away with either a sense of fulfillment from a life well lived or a sense of regret and despair over a life misspent.

Depending on the answer the aging adult begins to entertain or rejects his or her state of being subject to death. Those who are pleased during this phase will feel that their life has been wasted and will experience many regrets; leaving the feelings of bitterness and despair.

The church, therefore need to build old age in the context of God who is love, encouraging the Elderly in the church to accept ageing as part of the journey by which Christ leads us to the Father's house (*John 14:2*) in light of faith, strengthened by hope which does not deceive (*Rom 5:5*). I must say it is not a wonderful feeling to know that one has not lived a worthwhile life and cannot do better in old age.

#### Dialogue Between The Generations

**Younger generations are losing a sense of history and consequently the sense of their own identity.**

**A society that minimizes the sense of history fails in its responsibility to educate young people.**

**A society that ignores the past more easily runs the risk of repeating its errors.**

**The loss of an historical sense is also attributable to a system of life that has marginalized and isolated older people, and that hampers dialogue between the generations.**

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***Some people never find their reason for living until their latter years:***

History has demonstrated that **the best work for a number of persons is in their old age, and in many cases this happens when self examination of a 'life lived'** is done and there is the strong desire to be used to shape and change lives. There are also the times when elderly feels that they have failed and cannot be of any use to anyone and decide to just wait to die. The latter is not always so because this may just be the point where God wanted one to be so that they can be used to do greater things.

If the story of **Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1-4)** – is considered it will be realized that some find their purpose in old age. **Naomi** left her home town in her younger years with her husband and two sons in search of a better life; her sons and husband died and she felt worthless and decided to go back home. Her daughter in law **Ruth** decided to return with her to her homeland where **Naomi** nursed her grand-child **Obed** and teach him her faith by planting seed for the future generation.

***.....could Naomi have known that Obed would be an ancestor of the Messiah?***

We all know the story that **Obed** was the father of **Jessie**, and **Jessie** was the father of **King David**. How could **Naomi** have known that **Obed** would be an ancestor of the **Messiah** – how could **Naomi** have known that **Ruth** who refused to leave her was part of her **Divine destiny** to place her in the family tree of **Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour** – **What a Legacy!**

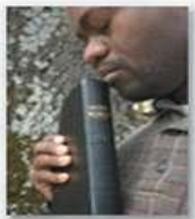
***In old age they will still bear fruit... (Ps 92:14)***

The power of God can be revealed in old age, even if it is characterized by physical impediments and difficulties. "God chose those who by human standards are weak—those who count for nothing—to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being might feel boastful before God" (*1 Cor 1:27-29*). God's plan of salvation is also fulfilled in the fragility of bodies that are weak, barren, and no longer young.

It was from **Sarah's barren womb** and **Abraham's centenarian body** that the Chosen People were born (*Rom 4:18-20*). And, similarly, it was from **Elizabeth's barren womb** and the elderly **Zechariah** that **John the Baptist**, the precursor of Christ, was born (*Lk 1:5-25*). **Older people, even when their lives take on the semblance of weakness, may, with good reason, consider themselves instruments of the history of salvation:** "I shall satisfy him with long life, and grant him to see my salvation" (*Ps 91:16*), promises the Lord.

***Biblical Approach to Old Age***

"The span of our life is seventy years, eighty for those who are strong, but their whole extent is anxiety and trouble, they are over in a moment, and we are gone" (*Ps 90:10*). *Ecclesiastes*—providing a lengthy description of physical decline and death in symbolical images—paint a sombre picture of old age.



This psalm, *Ps 71:1*) testifies to the religious feelings felt by the soul in the presence of the Lord. Prayer is the principal means for a spiritual understanding of life to older people. Prayer is a service; it is a ministry that older people may perform for the good of the whole Church and the world. Even the most infirm and handicapped of them can pray.

Prayer is their strength, it is their life. Through prayer they can break down the walls of isolation, emerge from their condition of helplessness, and share in the joys and sorrows of others. Prayer is of central importance. It also touches on the question how an older person can become deep in the spirit. According to James Francis, Catholic Priest an older person, confined to bed and reduced to the end of his or her physical strength, can, by praying, become like a monk, a hermit; and through prayer he or she can embrace the whole world.

The encounter with God in prayer introduces into the course of history a power which touches hearts, leads to conversion and renewal, and so becomes a powerful historical force transforming society.

### *The lives of older people & the role of the church*

“The *lives of older people* help to cast light on the scale of human values; to reveal the continuity of the generations and wonderfully demonstrate the interdependence of the People of God”.<sup>1</sup> To this exchange of gifts older people bring religious and moral values that represent a rich spiritual endowment for the life of Christian communities, families and the world.

***The role of the church*** must be to strive to help older persons to live their own lives in the light of the faith and to rediscover in it the value of the resources that they are still able, and still have a responsibility, to place at the service of others.

***Is your church Senior/Elderly sensitive?*** If all you have is a Sunday School class specially for them on a Sunday it is **not** good enough, especially if the Teacher does not take time to understand the characteristics and needs of this group. I have personally seen classes where the elderly fall asleep and it is not age related but they are bored because what is being said is not ministering (sensitive) to their needs. They basically need to be ignited to maximizing their God-given potential to the very minute they die – showed the reason to keep going until the Lord calls.

***Recognize that older members of the church generally have much more time available to engage in church activities and events.*** \*Make an active effort to involve seniors and homebound worshippers in planning activities and events. \* Creating activities that ageing members can also enjoy ensuring that they are kept engaged and feeling included. \* They can also help plan and prepare functions, make phone calls, and help with newsletters and bulletins.



**Social and spiritual accessibility are equally important** -. The church must be fully accessible to all members, and everyone should be concerned with the attitudinal and communicational barriers. Everybody wants to feel valued and to be heard by fellow members of the church. Being understanding and accepting of people's different situations and needs is what will create a welcoming and accommodating environment.

### **Dementia & Alzheimer's:**

Just to add that effective ministry is also being sensitive to the mental states of the elderly; it is important to understand two common disorders which most times affect this age group - Dementia & Alzheimer's. **Dementia is not a specific disease; It's an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms** associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Alzheimer's is a brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills and accounts for 60 to 80 percent of cases of mental disruptions in the elderly.

There is a tendency for churches to not give the attention to the elderly that is deserved because it might be felt that it is a biological family matter but what we do, when we do affects the church in one way or another. There is a popular saying that how we treat the elderly will determine how strong we will be as a church; and that *some of 'ills' that we are experiencing right now is as a result of how we have been treating older folks over the years. Older folks are not going away they are living longer.*

**DID YOU KNOW?** that right here in Jamaica according to Dr Eldemire-Shearer of the Mona Ageing & Wellness Centre some of the ageing challenges we will be faced with are:

- \*by 2025 will be 25% of the population will be elderly;
- \*- Most Jamaicans will live at least 20 years after retirement;
- \* - 32.9% of Jamaica's elderly population is single;
- \* - 17.3% of Jamaica's elderly lived alone; more females than males;
- \* - Most elderly Jamaicans (92.6%) have children, however up to 50% of the children lived abroad;
- \* - Family is main source of income for 49.5% of Jamaica's elderly;
- \*- Up to 60% of Jamaica's elderly population has no pension:
  - \* - Nearly 45% of Jamaica's elderly population have some difficulties walking distances, standing, climbing stairs, carrying things;
  - \* - 76.4% had at least one chronic disease.

Source - Mona Ageing and Wellness Centre published in the Sunday Gleaner 24/7/2016

**Ministering to the elderly** is a vital, rewarding ministry that God emphasizes in His Word. By overcoming incorrect thought patterns, realizing the benefits of ministry, and reaching out in practical ways, we can have a meaningful ministry to the elderly that will enrich not only them but the generations which follows.



## Prayer for Later Years -Elderly

“All Gracious God, you have given me all I am and have, and now I give it all back to You to stand under Your will alone.

In a special way I give You these later years of my life. I am one of those called by You into old age, a call not given to all, not given to Jesus, not given to most in our world today. I humbly ask You, grace me deeply in each aspect of that struggle.

\*As my **physical eyesight weakens**, may the eyes of my faith strengthen that I may see you and Your Love in everything?

\*As my **hearing fails** may the ears of my heart be more attentive to the whisper of Your gentle voice.

\*As my **legs weaken and walking becomes more difficult** may I walk more truly in Your paths, knowing all the while that I am held in the embrace of Your Love.

\*As my **mind becomes less alert and memory fades** may I remain peaceful in you, aware that with You there is no need for thought or word. You ask simply that I be there with You.

And \* **should sickness overtake me** and I be confined to bed, may I know myself as one with Your Son as he offers his life for the salvation of the world.

Finally as \* **my heart slows** a little after the work of the years may it expand in love for You and all people. May it rest secure and grateful in Your loving Heart until I am lost in You completely and forever. Amen”.

*Prayer adapted by Thomas Berry, Australian Minister to the Elderly*

### *General ways to minister to the Elderly*

*Read to them.* Because their eyesight is diminishing, many elderly people can no longer read. Elderly Christians particularly like having Bible passages read to them.

*Take them out.* Those who can no longer drive appreciate being taken to the places they need to go, such as church, shopping, or running errands. They also enjoy being taken somewhere special as a treat, like out to eat.

*Send them cards.* Cards make people feel special and loved. Knowing someone is thinking of them encourages everyone.

*Bring them food.* Most elderly people find cooking difficult. Occasionally providing food for them gives them a needed rest.

*Do work around the house for them or run errands for them.* Volunteering to do work around the house or running errands is a great help to the elderly, especially because many of them would otherwise have to hire someone to do the work for them.

*Provide tapes for them to listen to.* Those who can't get out very much especially enjoy listening to sermon or inspirational tapes.

*Bring them small gifts.* Everyone loves to be surprised by gifts. Flowers, stuffed animals, or other creative ideas are always a good way to brighten an elderly person's day.