



2017

Christmas Friendship & Loneliness

Starting and Sustaining Conversations Resource



Pilgrims' Friend Society, with help from:

FaithinLaterLife.org
The Gift of Years
Linking Lives
Livability
Parish Nursing UK
Torch Trust
The Salvation Army

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1. Introduction – what to do with this resource

According to Church Urban Fund 87% of churches are reaching out in some way to lonely and isolated people. Christmas is a wonderful time for this ministry as it's a time when perceived loneliness can be at its peak.

Loneliness amongst older people is a complex affair as the lack of friends and confidence that we all suffer from is compounded by the death of family members and friends with whom much might have been shared. And Loneliness is much more than just a lack of contact with others as the Age UK booklet referenced below helpfully outlines.

We know that people were created to be in relationship with God and with others as many of the pictures used in the Bible speak to this truth: the Church as a body with Christ as the head; Jesus as the true vine with believers as the branches; Jesus praying for Jerusalem longing to gather people to him as a hen would to its chicks etc. So that we know that reaching out to lonely older people is part of God's plans and purposes.

Starting a conversation and sustaining conversations with older people is only a start to addressing loneliness, but it's an important step that we trust this resource will help you take this Christmas. It encourages you to:

Stage 1: Start in your own church - use this resource to reflect on the Bible; pray and then act by starting a new conversation with an older person over the Christmas period.

Stage 2: Now that you are in the swing of things this Christmas see how you can sustain things beyond the Christmas period.

Useful resources in addition to the pages in this pack:

Church Urban Fund

<https://www.cuf.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=06a66cd5-15c0-4fe5-a837-f5f417a2d2b7>

Age UK has published a good leaflet that churches will find helpful.

http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Policy/Promising_approaches_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true

Contact the Elderly

http://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk/SM4/Mutable/Uploads/medialibrary/Volunteer-leaflet_VL0714-NB.pdf.

Linking Lives

<http://linkinglives.uk/>

Premier Christian Radio's A Place to Go on Christmas Day Appeal

<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Advent/A-place-to-go-on-Christmas-Day2>

The Bible Reading Fellowship - for more ideas for reaching out to older people, BRF's, The Gift of Years www.thegiftofyears.org.uk

Faith in Later Life - for a range of resources to inspire and equip churches and their members www.faithinlaterlife.org.uk

Finally, please all of this is offered in the knowledge that our greatest need at Christmas is to "Love the Lord your God" and to know his love in return. That is why we start this resource with scripture and prayer.

2. Bible and Prayer - before your Christmas outreach events

Genesis 2:18 The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be **alone**. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Numbers 11 16,17 “The LORD said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that **you will not have to carry it alone.**”

1 Timothy 5,5 “The widow who is really in need and left all **alone** puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help”

John 15 1-5 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ **Remain in me, as I also remain in you.** No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

1 Corinthians 12, 27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and **each one of you is a part of it.**”

Matthew 25 37-40 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ **When did we see you a stranger and invite you in,** or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

1 John 4,7 “Dear friends, **let us love one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God”

Matthew 22, 37-40 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[c] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’^[d] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Read some of these scriptures and pray:

- That the Holy Spirit would minister to those who are lonely because of things in their spirit
- For people who feel distant from the Lord and from his Church
- God would stir up churches to be a body where each one is embraced as a part
- For local visiting and befriending schemes known to you.
- For your specific ministries of outreach, visitation and befriending this Christmas.

3. Ten top tips for conversation this Christmas

1. Smile

Starting a conversation with a smile is a great way to show someone that you have time for them and you're not rushing off - nonverbal cues are particularly important for people living with dementia.

2. Listen

Spend time listening to someone's stories, and ask questions. Often a "Tell me about your favourite Christmas..." question offers more of an invitation than a "What" or a "When".

3. Read something together

Whether it's the local newspaper, or the church notice sheet, take time to read something aloud together. At Christmas suggest reading together the gospel accounts of Jesus's birth, or a Christmas carols or poems (<https://www.poemhunter.com/poems/christmas/>)

4. Do something together

Conversation often flows more naturally when you are doing something at the same time. Think about writing and addressing Christmas cards, making gift labels; wrapping Christmas presents or other Christmas crafts (<http://www.elder-one-stop.com/simple-christmas-crafts.html>)

5. Ask someone's opinion

Not sure about a decision you need to make? Why not ask for someone's view. They are likely to add something you hadn't thought of. Ask for ideas for Christmas presents?

6. Notice your surroundings

What can you see around you? Are the Christmas trees like the ones you remember? What's the weather doing today? What do you think of the Christmas decorations

7. Spend time in companionable silence (without words)

Sometimes it's good to spend time together without chatting. Just being together, whether we are listening to the radio, or just watching the world go by, it's good to spend time together. Look at pictures or a video/DVD of a classic Christmas film, or a You Tube of favourite carols (https://youtu.be/CHj_q7ttDCE).

8. Check in on someone

Pop in to see a neighbour to see how they are and see if there's anything you can help with, like taking out the bin or changing a light bulb

9. Offer help

Ask someone if you can pick up anything for them at the shops for Christmas, or take a trip to the shops together. Why not offer a lift to your event or carol service, or help to take someone to a health appointment?

10. Chat in a queue

You can be bolder at Christmas, use all the Christmas cues around to approach someone older even if it's only the person next to you in the supermarket queue.