

Positional Statement on Older People

In our nation, life expectancy is increasing.¹ For many people, increasing age can bring accomplishments and fulfilment as well as opportunities. For others, increasing age may be accompanied by loneliness, isolation, mental and physical frailty, or dementia. While some older people carry out an active role in society, others are unable to do so.

The Bible teaches that all human life is a unique gift from God and that we are made in his image.² Consequently people of all ages should be treated with dignity and respect without being exploited or patronised.³ Advancing years or diminishing capacity do not lessen the value and worth of a person. The Bible instructs us to honour our parents and to provide for relatives, especially our immediate family.⁴ Based on this teaching, The Salvation Army opposes discrimination against older people and seeks to ensure that all older people receive the services and resources they need irrespective of their income or family networks.

Advancing years should not necessarily signal the end of independence, creativity or usefulness. The Bible celebrates the vital contribution older people can make to their community.⁵ Following these biblical examples, Salvationists of all ages are encouraged to continue using their spiritual gifts, talents and expertise in the service of others. Drawing on their experience, older people can be a positive influence on their families, friends and community. In freely offering their time and skills, they can make a valuable contribution to Salvation Army worship, community and social programmes.

From its inception, The Salvation Army has endeavoured to care for people, especially those who are vulnerable.⁶ With families often fragmented or scattered geographically, some older people who live on their own can feel isolated without any regular family contact. To address this need, Salvation Army corps provide localised help with opportunities to meet and share, provision of activities and meals, befriending and good neighbour schemes. Salvation Army residential care homes seek to address the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people who are generally frail. The aim throughout is to ensure that the final chapter of life is good with positive memories, upheld by dignity and respect through to the end of life.

End notes

1. Office for National Statistics www.ons.gov.uk ilc (accessed June 2014).
2. 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).
3. 'Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity' (1 Timothy 5:1,2).
4. "'Honour your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise' (Ephesians 6:2).
'Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:8).
5. Moses and Aaron were advanced in years when God sent them to Pharaoh to begin negotiations for the release of the Israelites from slavery (Exodus 7:7).
Anna, an older woman, was among the first to realise and acknowledge the significance of the birth of Jesus the Messiah (Luke 2:36-39).
6. As an employer, it also makes provision for pensions on retirement.

Bible quotations from *New International Version* 2011.

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