

PPC Discussion Document 4¹

Care for the Elderly

Step 1: Examine the present reality in our parish

- How do we keep in contact with the housebound?
- Is there a facility for the housebound to tune into our church and parish celebrations?
- How do we provide opportunities and ministry-related events for aging members of our parish?

Step 2: Take time to reflect

Loneliness among older people is believed to be as damaging to their health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, with older generations at risk of increased isolation as young emigrants move abroad, according to the Alone charity. Social isolation among older people - those aged 65 years and over - puts ageing populations at a higher risk of dementia, cardiovascular disease and decreased immune system responsiveness, according to the Irish charity.

The latest figures from the Central Statistics Office show there are 586,600 older people over the age of 65 in the State. Sean Moynihan, Chief Executive of Alone, says older people living alone often have limited social interaction with the outside world and are at risk of taking less exercise, often leading to ill-health including depression. “Just under a third of older people live on their own and that number will continue to climb,” said Mr Moynihan. “Loneliness has become a chronic situation and is affecting older people's well-being.” “It is vitally important that as we age, we maintain strong links with our local community.”

Research carried out by The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda) in 2014 found mothers of children who had moved abroad in recent years had experienced an increase in depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness. Mr Moynihan worries that we have yet to see the real effects of emigration among the older generations left behind in Ireland. “The age that people emigrate,

¹ This discussion document has been developed by The Pastoral Renewal Team of the Kerry Diocese and is shared with the Parish Pastoral Councils of the Elphin Diocese with permission.

their parents are usually in their late 50s. We're only seeing the effects five to seven years later. People settle down abroad, don't come home and parents can end up becoming isolated.”

According to the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (Cardi), depression is set to become the second leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020. The growing rate of depression is expected to disproportionately affect older adults.

Cardi warns that depression among older people tends to go undiagnosed and is often accepted as a natural part of the ageing process. “Over the next 30 years, 20,000 people will turn 65 every year, that's 400 people a week,” said Mr Moynihan. “Older people need good services of a consistent quality, to ensure that they don't slip through the cracks and become isolated from other people.”²

Step 3: Explore various options

Having looked at the reality of elderly people's experience in our parish and taken time to reflect on the newspaper's report changing reality of elderly people, explore the various possibilities of how our parish could enhance its contact with the elderly.

Step 4: Identify specific actions

- Informed by the discussion and reflection, identify specific actions that we could carry out in order to enhance elderly people's experience of our parish;
- If no action has been agreed, identify what further research is needed.

Step 5: When the action is completed take time to review it by exploring:

- Did the action achieve its purpose?
- What was not effective?
- Is there a follow -up action needed?

² Taken from: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/loneliness-among-older-people-increases-health-risks-says-charity-1.2096920> and published 9/2/2015.