

A Telling Minority

Spirituality of
Older Men

A Pilot Study for
MHA Care Group



By Dr Janet Eldred

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Contents

The Project.....	07
Literature.....	09
The Interviewees.....	13
Postal Survey Responses.....	19
Analysis.....	25
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	29
Appendix One.....	33
Appendix Two.....	35
Appendix Three.....	39
Bibliography.....	45
Acknowledgements.....	47

The Project

The "Why", "What", and "How" of the study

MHA Care Group is one of the UK's leading providers of care, support and housing services for older people. It seeks to provide the highest possible standards of service within a compassionate, Christian culture, and its services are available to persons of all faiths and none.

One of MHA Care Group's key areas of focus is raising awareness of the spirituality of ageing. Its working definition of spirituality is 'what gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being'. It uses this to enhance the services it provides. MHA Care Group also undertakes research to increase understanding of various aspects of the spirituality of ageing. This pilot study sought to improve understandings of the spirituality of older men from a Christian perspective in order to help MHA Care Group and the Church recognise and support their spiritual expression.

Older men are a minority, both in British society and in MHA's Care Homes. According to the 2001 Census, men comprise only 32.5% of the population aged 80 and over, only 27.6% of the population aged 85 and over, and just 22.4% of the population aged 90 and over. Within MHA, men comprise just 17.3% of the residents in Care Homes and 24.1% of the residents in Sheltered Housing Schemes.¹ Because of their small numbers in relation to older women, it is easy to neglect, overlook, or misunderstand older men's particular needs.

Several questions lie at the heart of this study: is men's spirituality different from women's spirituality? Is older men's spirituality different from that of younger men? And, is older men's spirituality different from that of older women? While it is beyond the scope of this research to examine these questions in detail, our assumption in undertaking this study was that such differences do exist. The research explored the spirituality of selected older men living in MHA's Care Homes, some of whom partake in regular prayer and Bible study meetings. Data collection involved a literature review (see next section), a postal survey, and semi-structured interviews.

The postal survey

Home Managers and Chaplains were asked to nominate male residents who could be approached to participate in the pilot study. The Steering Group (see Appendix One) decided that participants did not need to be Christian, as it would be beneficial to have the input of a variety of residents.

¹ On 12 November 2004, there were 325 men and 1557 women in MHA's Care Homes and 219 men and 689 woman in Sheltered Housing Schemes.

Themes identified from the literature review formed the basis of the questions included in the postal survey (see Appendix Three.) The surveys were sent to either the Home Manager or the Activities Coordinator, who in turn gave them to the residents. At the same time, each Home Manager was asked to provide background details of each participant in the form of a pen portrait. Forty-two surveys were posted and 19 completed and returned, a 45% return rate.

The interviews

From the completed surveys, the Steering Group selected six men for interview, based on what the members saw as detailed and intriguing statements worth following up, depth of feeling (as reflected in "strongly agree/strongly disagree" responses), and a desire to be interviewed. There was a good geographic spread among the six, with only two of them living in the same residential home. One man later declined to be interviewed, leaving five – an adequate number of interviewees for a small pilot study. Each man signed a consent form before the interview.

The interview questions were based on both the literature review and the results of the postal survey. The questions fell into these general categories: spirituality, answers from the postal survey, work and retirement, abstract questions, church, and being a man/fatherhood. In general, each interview lasted about 45 minutes, with the researcher spending approximately two hours in total with each man. The interview schedule (see Appendix Three) was useful as a guide, but conversations were allowed to stray from the prepared questions if a line of thought was relevant and interesting. All interviews were taped and transcribed. All of the names used in this report are pseudonyms, in order to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

Literature

Masculinities, male spirituality, and men's political and social movements

There is extensive literature (some of it academic, a great deal of it popular) on the subjects of masculinities, male spirituality, and men's political and social movements.² With respect to spirituality, a brief examination of the literature reveals that there is a strong belief that differences between men's and women's spirituality are real and important. While there is no overall agreement on what constitutes a male spirituality (nor even a Christian male spirituality), some themes dominate (see below). The proliferation of texts on the subject alone indicates, if not a crisis, at least a strong need to understand manhood, masculinity, and male spirituality and then use them productively to resolve personal issues and/or to strengthen the church.

Influences and themes

Various personal and cultural influences on men aged 80-100 were considered, as a means of preparing to meet and understand the generation(s) of men in the study. The issues considered were national (e.g., world war, post-imperialism, economic depression and austerity, birth of the welfare state); personal (e.g. being a son, brother, husband, father, widower, friend); education and work (including retirement); identity (e.g. home, community, race, gender roles); social (e.g. class, hobbies and entertainment, clubs); and religious (e.g. Sunday school, adult roles in church).

The following six themes, and the associated questions they raise, were those most frequently discussed in the literature.

Being a man

This includes issues of sexuality (i.e. maleness) as well as gender (i.e. masculinity).³ Bodily change as men age is something to consider (e.g. increased vulnerability, approaching death).⁴ Gender issues revolve around social roles and expectations, with patriarchy being a key topic. The lack of formal initiation rites for most men in Christian western society is discussed as a problem, as boys do not learn how to be men. With all of the negatives pointed out by feminists, and with all of the changes to men's traditional roles in our society, is it possible for men to celebrate their manhood?

² There are numerous men's political and social movements, each of which focuses on different aspects and concerns of men's lives (see Appendix Two).

³ See Nelson (1992) and James (1996).

⁴ See Nelson (1992).

Fatherhood

A man's relationship with his father is critical to his image of himself and to how he interacts with others.⁵ According to the literature, men commonly have damaged relationships with their own fathers, who in turn had damaged relationships with their fathers, and so on back through the generations. These relationships need to be healed. Being a father is also important, especially as it gives a man the opportunity to provide what was missing in his own relationship with his father, thereby bringing up a more whole and healthy generation of boys and young men.

Friendship

Western society has tended to perpetuate the belief that men are competitive loners. Most of the authors commented on the need for men to seek community and companionship with other men, to build open, honest and trusting friendships.⁶ Intimacy and deep sharing are necessary, as is non-judgemental listening.⁷ Small groups (not necessarily church-based or religious) are recommended. How is this imperative balanced with a need for solitude and aloneness to pursue one's self-examination/spirituality?

Spirituality

Is male spirituality based on certain archetypes drawn from millennia of male living, such as the Wildman or Warrior (to give two examples)? Is it based on a deeper connection with nature and creation? Is it based on teachings from the Bible? Is a quest involved? The idea of "connection" is important to spirituality (so the texts say)⁸; but connection to what and to whom? What sorts of ideas of "God" does a man have, and can men be open to a wider range of ideas? If spirituality involves feelings, emotions, intuition and the unconscious – even the body – can men relate to this?⁹ Where can men comfortably ask the questions they want to ask?

The church

Are mainline Christian churches a healthy place for men or are they women-only spaces? Can men be men at church, or do they need to be either "feminised" or "androgynous" to fit in? Is the church a place men can turn to to help them on their spiritual journeys? Or, are answers to be found outside the churches?

⁵ See Biddulph (2004).

⁶ See Biddulph (2004) and James (1996).

⁷ See Nelson (1992).

⁸ See James (1996).

⁹ See James (1996).

Work

A man's identity is often inseparable from the work he does. If work is a source of spirituality for men, what happens after retirement? Is it possible for men to become less competitive, more collaborative and more receptive? Is older age (i.e. post-retirement) an easier time for dealing with spirituality because a man is not engrossed in the ethics and activities of the workplace?

Finally, MHA has produced numerous important resources on the spirituality of ageing, older people's spiritual needs, etc. While it is not necessary to review these for this report's audience, I wish to single out two pieces of work that bear on this study. The first is MHA's working definition of spirituality, noted at the beginning of this report. The second is the leaflet, 'Recognising People's Spiritual Needs',¹⁰ which names six needs of older people: companionship/friendship, affirmation, celebration, confirmation, reconciliation, and integration. I will return to these in the "Analysis" section of this report.

Gaps

Most of the literature on masculinities, male spirituality and men's political and social movements is US-based and the majority of it is quite recent (from the 1990s onwards). Also, much of it is written by and for young to middle-aged men. Almost no mention is made of older men, other than to suggest to these younger men that they seek out older men as repositories of wisdom.¹¹ For example, Donegan-Cross writes, 'we need to explore the untapped resources of age and accumulated wisdom among the older men in our churches'.¹² While indeed important, this task should not be the foremost activity among or by older men. Rather, both churches and older men should first examine the latter's lives in their own right, including their need to progress on their spiritual journeys.

Another gap in the literature is that old age is viewed as universally good. But, what are older men's unmet needs and desires? Has no one directly asked older men about their concerns, let alone their spiritual questions? What is the downside of growing and of being older? What are the disappointments, problems, painful issues?

Lastly, studies of older people often focus on both men and women combined or only on women (due to their larger numbers). The minority of very old men (80+) makes this area a specialist, hard-to-generalise area of investigation. When subdivided further by accommodation (e.g. own home, residential home, nursing home, etc.), this makes it even more difficult to generalise. What are the particular spiritual concerns of men in residential care? We will begin by listening to the interviewees.

¹⁰ Jewell (1999).

¹¹ An important exception is Thompson (2002), who considers older men's religious practice and spirituality through the lens of retirement from the workforce.

¹² Donegan-Cross (2000), p.24.

The Interviewees

Five unique individuals

All five men interviewed were white British and in their 80s and 90s. They live in four different residential homes in England and Wales and represent a range of social, educational, and economic backgrounds. All of the names used here are pseudonyms.

Mr Elliott: 'I feel very lonely without her'.

Mr Elliott is in his 90s. He was brought up in the church and taught in Sunday school himself. In his adult life, church attendance was not important to him: '[My wife and I] didn't become good churchgoers, but we treated people in the way we would expect to be treated ourselves'. Mr Elliott worked in a managerial role towards the end of his career, but upon retirement cut himself off from his professional life, preferring to focus upon spending time with his wife. (They did not have children.) Sadly, Mrs. Elliott died about 18 months ago. Mr Elliott still has an active social life, playing golf with long-term friends on a weekly basis, and continues to live in the area in which he grew up. He sees a great deal of his niece whom he and his wife raised, and he has a good relationship with the Home Manager. Nevertheless, he feels very lonely without Mrs. Elliott.

Mr Elliott says that, for him, spirituality means 'being at peace with the world; sitting alone with my thoughts and happy memories; wondering whether, one day, I shall rejoin my wife and enjoy again the very happy times we shared together'. Mr Elliott's relationship with his wife was, and still is, central to his life.

Helps spiritual expression

- 'Memories'
- Regular worship services in the Home.
- People who knew his wife (e.g. Home Manager, old friends, staff at post office).
- Long-term friendships, maintaining contact with these friends. ('We chat. We share a tear together, reminisce about our school days together, and what have you!')
- Chats (and texting) with friends of different ages, one-on-one chats with the preacher.
- Family.
- Visiting wife's grave - ongoing relationship with his wife, even though she is deceased.

Hinders spiritual expression

- 'To see so much unkindness in the world today' (e.g. lack of discipline).
- Not being able to speak openly to his oldest friend about his (the friend's) lack of reciprocation. ('That's the difference, you see, between his Christianity and mine!')
- No longer being able to collect his pension at the post office. ('It was nice to go and have a chat, and they always wanted to know how you were. And they knew my wife as well. But now, of course, that is gone!')
- Lack of friends among fellow residents.
- Physical restrictions (back pain).

Mr Davis: 'All is well with my soul'.

Mr Davis was brought up as a churchgoer, and he has continued to attend church throughout his life, serving as a local preacher for 80 years. He regards his local church as being "the home of his spirit", and prefers the terms faith, Trinity, belief and grace to spirituality. He attends daily prayer meetings in his Home. Mr Davis was widowed a number of years ago. He takes great pride in his family and the fact that they love and respect each other; his extended family of 40, along with his strong faith, are the two most important things in his life. Mr Davis enjoys drawing and poetry, but wishes for more conversations in the Home. He is not living where he grew up, but has moved to this Home to be nearer to his family.

For Mr Davis, spirituality means 'my personal relationship with God, going to church, and worshipping God'. He would like to be remembered for being a believer, and his key principles are helping others and setting a good example. 'Spirituality, it's a big word. It can cover a great deal of ground. I would rather use the word "faith". I have a faith, and my faith is a very simple one'. He is concerned that his great-grandchildren are growing up in a world that is not spiritually minded, that is godless.

Helps spiritual expression

- Being in the choir, church, fellowship groups, discussing the Bible.
- Services in the Home, the fellowship of the residents.
- Always having been in, "really in", the church.
- Being a local preacher for many decades – this was a source of 'immense joy and pleasure'. Recalls two influential books from the early days of studying to be a local preacher.
- The grace and mercy of Christ: 'I cannot explain it, but it is something that is very real. I try every day to walk, if it is at all possible, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I try to talk to him as a man would talk to his very good friend'.
- Attending the local church regularly: 'A lovely place. I call it the home of my spirit'.
- Knows the Lord loves him and cares for him, so all is well with his soul.
- Memories of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and having Holy Communion at the Sea of Galilee.
- Occasional chats with speakers who take services at the Home.

Hinders spiritual expression

- 'If I don't go to church or have Christian fellowship'.
- Uncouth, unkind behaviour and language at his former residential home.
- Lack of mentally aware residents at this Home, therefore cannot have the deeper conversations he would like to (with one notable exception).

Mr Collins: 'What matters is the onward journey'.

A retired Methodist clergyman in his 80s, Mr Collins and his wife moved into this Home last year as a positive choice: his wife's increasing frailty was posing problems with home maintenance and independent living. (He is quite able, physically and mentally.) They chose this Home to be near their family. Mr Collins is still active in preaching and works on his own research projects now, as well as having other projects planned for the future. He attempts some pastoral care of fellow residents, but is aware of the boundaries that must be maintained both in a Home and in his role as supernumerary. (NB: He believes there should be classes to prepare ministers to be supernumeraries!) Mr Collins is a very literate, academic theologian. In the past, he gained much from friendships with other men, particularly within the circuits where he worked. The small number of men at the Home offers limited possibilities for such friendships, although he has found friends among the male staff. His contacts with other men in the Home are not always intellectually satisfying. In addition to his Bible, hymnbook, and John Wesley's *Directions to Penitents and Believers*, he has tried various forms of regular, private devotions to support his spirituality. He is confident in his Christian faith.

To Mr Collins, spirituality means growth in grace and in eternal life, which is knowing Jesus Christ. 'Jesus is life, he is the whole thing, and that is spirituality as far as I am concerned, not always thinking about yourself'. His key principle is following Jesus: 'What matters is the onward journey'.

Helps spiritual expression

- Prayer, the Word, and the Fellowship of God's people.
- Chats with some female residents and male staff.
- Sunday worship, Bible class, house group.
- Preparing to preach involves study and devotion (continuation of vocation and calling).
- Experimenting with different patterns of devotion.
- Having more time now, in older age, for the spiritual life as material concerns are laid aside.
- Bible and hymn book.

Hinders spiritual expression

- Few other male residents and hard to establish rapport with them, to get on "the same wavelength" (lack of common ground), therefore lack of spiritual support. Not getting as much back as he gives.
- Over-use of the word "spiritual": 'If it is not specific enough, it can be very airy-fairy. Some of these things that go under that title I don't find helpful'.
- Sloth; the temptation to do nothing, to sleep.
- Old age makes it difficult, at times, to concentrate.
- Living in community means having to be circumspect.

Mr Baker: 'When you need comfort, a spirituality helps you!'

Mr Baker is a very traditional Anglican in his 90s. Widowed and retired from the field of education, he has lived in this Home for several years now. He is registered blind, has a hearing aid, and walks with a stick, but is quite mobile, going for daily walks in the neighbourhood. He attends the local parish church each Sunday where he takes Holy Communion, which he describes as 'the nearest we get to God on this earth'. Mr Baker also attends the weekly worship service in the Home (to support the community and to meet friends), but isn't happy with the worship style, which is less formal than that of his parish church. He has had one or two close female friends in the Home, and his son-in-law and family regularly have him to Sunday dinner. However, he is very lonely for three reasons. First, he can no longer read or write due to loss of sight. Second, there are no men in the Home he feels he can have meaningful conversations with, as most of them are not at his intellectual level – although they are nice enough people, he finds their conversation boring. Third, no one at his parish church has ever invited him for a meal or for a drink.

Spirituality (a word Mr Baker is comfortable with) means 'a faith in God and applying that faith to circumstances in life'. Taking communion each week fills him with awe: 'In Holy Communion we wait for God to talk to us. Sometimes he does'. Mr Baker's beliefs in God and in his form of Christianity (Anglican) are very important to him.

Helps spiritual expression

- 'Meeting ordinary people and living with ordinary people. There are advantages of living with people with disabilities and living in a Home'.
- Attending local Anglican church.
- Taking communion.
- His wife (a Christian) and another female friend (a non-believer), both now deceased.
- Going out and talking to people on his daily walks.
- David Attenborough's book about his travels: 'It is a beautifully written book, but I was interested in the revelation that it made of his character'.

Hinders spiritual expression

- Services in the Home. He attends for the community with fellow residents but not the practice of worship, preferring a more formal style.
- Isolation and loneliness. 'You are in a community here and you know everybody by their Christian name, and yet you feel lonely because it is quite difficult to make contact with them'.
- Lack of invitations from his fellow parishioners: 'I would love somebody to come up and say, come and have a drink, John'.
- Blindness (cannot read or write), so being alone is not helpful: 'When I could read, it didn't cause me any trouble, but not being able to read causes me problems'.
- Lack of connection with other male residents ('I get on very well with them, but they don't speak my language and I don't speak theirs'), therefore lonely.

Mr Anderson: 'I lost my anchor completely'.

Now in his 80s, Mr Anderson has lived in this Home for several years. Due to various disabilities, he is essentially restricted to his room. He is widowed without children, but has siblings living elsewhere in the country. He describes himself as 'not good with people', though he says he has always got on well with children. He left school at 14 and is not much interested in books; however, he taught himself many manual skills (e.g. gardening, carpentry) which he says he was good at and enjoyed. Unfortunately, serious illness and the resulting incapacity forced him to retire from work and hobbies. This, along with his wife's serious illness and death, left him feeling that 'the bottom had fallen out of my life'. Mr Anderson feels out of place with the other residents of the Home and has little to share with them. He says that some staff members appear to be too busy with their work to have a chat. A lifelong Methodist, his great joy in his faith was his singing, especially in choirs; but those days are gone. He says he has never got his faith 'right into' himself as he has desired to all his life (and as his father had done).

Mr Anderson says this about his spirituality: 'Throughout my life, especially through childhood, my learning and practice of my faith has encouraged in my later years a great help and a strong belief in the Spirit of God'. Even so, he dreads dying as his faith is not as strong as he wishes it were. His key principles are honesty and reliability, and he tries to have a peaceful and useful life.

Helps spiritual expression

- A live church service, particularly singing.
- Methodist hymn book. ('I get more out of the hymn book than I do out of the Bible', though he regards this as second-hand and he feels this is not good enough.)
- Helping other people, children.

Hinders spiritual expression

- Not being able to get to local church (no transportation).
- Unable to be involved in practical things such as gardening and volunteering.
Not being able to make things.
- Being far from siblings, so cannot visit them.
- Illness (his own and his late wife's).
- Not being able to pray. 'Prayer is minimal for me. I have never indulged in a deep sense of prayer and the presence. It has never come to me.'
- Lack of variety in the worship services at the Home.

A picture of older men's spirituality begins to emerge

The interviewees were very open and spoke "from the heart". Their willingness to share ideas and feelings, even prejudices and anxieties, was striking. Having worthwhile work and activities to do and important people to share their lives with – to love – was key. As a group, the men were thoughtful and considered when answering questions.

The men used words from the Christian language to discuss spirituality in general as well as their own spirituality. In fact, most of them preferred to use words such as "faith", "belief", "worship", and "Christ", rather than "spirituality". Their spirituality was grounded in a traditional, early-twentieth-century Christian context of Sunday school and churchgoing. God was seen as having a direct relationship with humanity. Living a good life was equated with the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments. There was nothing that would be described as unconventional in their spirituality.

Spirituality was expressed by attending worship services in the Home, at a local church, or both. Bible-reading, hymn-singing, listening to church music, and prayer were common. Some of the men were also involved in small groups for Bible study and one, Mr Collins, practiced private devotions. More generally, spirituality expressed itself in sharing stories and mementoes of loved ones, feeling hopeful because of one's faith, engaging with others in the Home and with family, and continuing to lead a good life. Mr Elliott's spirituality was very much wrapped up in his connection to his late wife: recalling past good times and seeking present contact (at the graveside) and future contact (in the afterlife) with her. Time to reflect was important, but so was the fellowship of like minds.

Factors that inhibited their spiritual expression were varied. For some, physical disabilities and infirmities made them unable to attend worship outside the Home. All of the interviewees noted a lack of other men they could relate to, either among the residents or staff. Loneliness, described as not having someone on the same wavelength to speak with, led to feelings of not being understood and of being isolated emotionally and/or intellectually. A couple of the men were rather shy and described their late wives as having been very outgoing; this could contribute to their loneliness. Not being able to seek, or not having found, companionship outside of the Home indicated that not all needs for company were (or necessarily should be) met in the Home.

Postal Survey Responses

In addition to the five face-to-face interviews, 19 men (including the interviewees) completed and returned the postal survey.

The postal survey was divided into two sections. Section One questions asked the participant to select one of the following responses: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. The responses follow. (NB: For the purposes of the summary, "strongly agree" and "agree" responses have been combined under "agree", while "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses have been combined under "disagree".)

Q1: I get support from my friendships with other men.

agree	neutral	disagree
58%	26%	16%

Therefore, male friendship (when available) is an important support.

Q2: As I get older, the spiritual aspects of life become more important.

agree	neutral	disagree
63%	21%	16%

Therefore, spirituality is important in older age.

Q3: Working and providing for my family were important to me.

agree	neutral	disagree
100%	0%	0%

Work and provision for family were central to their lives.

Q4: Retirement from paid work changed my sense of who I am.

agree	neutral	disagree
47%	32%	21%

A split across the spectrum; therefore, we need to know more about why this varies. (On the surface, this seems to be inconsistent with Q3 (above), but may not be upon investigation.)

Q5: Living in a residential home has made it easier to practice my faith.

agree	neutral	disagree
53%	31%	16%

This depends on the individual and/or the Home.

Q6: As I get older, church has become less important to me.

agree	neutral	disagree
16%	31%	53%

The church has continuing importance.

Q7: I enjoy having time on my own, to think my own thoughts.

agree	neutral	disagree
95%	5%	0%

Time to reflect is critical.

Q8: During my lifetime, it has become harder to be a man in our society.

agree	neutral	disagree
26%	42%	26%

(1 respondent gave no answer)

A very even split across the spectrum, with the high percentage of "neutral" responses indicating, perhaps, that the question had little meaning for the respondents.

Q9: The image of God as Father is important to me.

agree	neutral	disagree
79%	16%	5%

A very important image of God.

In the responses, we see some traditional aspects of male life in our society and in church life. There is the importance of work and being a provider (Q3) and the importance of the image of God as Father (Q9). There is an indication of support from others (Q1) as well as the need for solitude (Q7). Spiritual aspects of life have increasing importance (Q2), and the residential home and/or the church may be an important support in this (Q5, Q6). However, the responses to Q5 and Q6 may mean something else altogether (e.g. social contact, religious services come to the man without effort on his part, etc.). There is a more even split in opinions with respect to Q4 (change in self-image post-retirement) and Q8 (whether it's harder these days to be a man).

The final question in this section asked, "Have you read anything that has either reinforced or changed how you think about your own spirituality? If so, what have you read?" Only a few men named any books. Those books named, and the number of responses for each book, were:

Wesley's Directions to Penitents and Believers for making and renewing their Covenant with God (1).

Bible (5) and "The Scriptures" (1).

"My hymn book" (1).

"Hymns of Wesleys and Watts, books of W. E. Sangster, poems of John Masefield and John Betjeman, articles and letters in the Methodist Recorder" (1).

"Church music" (1).

David Attenborough's book on his travels (1).

Section Two of the postal survey had nine open-ended questions. The following is a selection of responses to these, some of which are from the five interviewees.

Q1: To me, spirituality means:

- 'A life guided and interpreted by Jesus Christ'.
- 'The exercise of that part of me which depends on communion with God to the same degree as my physical body cannot function without breath'.
- 'Philosophy. Always tried to think logically and haven't always accepted blind faith'.
- 'God is a great part of my life, especially my church'.

Q2: What fills you with awe or a sense of wonder?

- 'The amazing sense of continuity when I realise what it is to be a son and a father at the same time'.
- 'The concept of the whole universe with its millions of galaxies'.
- 'Music'.
- 'The hills, countryside, open space, nature'.
- 'The whole of God's creation'.
- 'A sense that fundamentally God is there. Is he interested in me? I am wondering'.

Q3: What would you most like to be remembered for?

- 'Enjoying life, being who I am, helping others'.
- 'Being a good citizen and family man'.
- 'My work in my church'.
- 'My faith in God'.
- 'For my friendship towards others who are disabled like me, and who are worse off'.

Q4: What is the key principle by which you live your life today?

- 'Live one day at a time and try to make the most of everything'.
- 'Keeping in fellowship with the Lord'.
- 'Helping other people'.
- 'You accept what is placed before you'.
- 'Friendship'.

Q5: What helps you experience or express your spirituality?

- 'Prayer'.
- 'Church service'.
- 'Hymn singing'.
- 'Being helpful'.
- 'Weekly devotions'.
- 'Talking about it'.

Q6: What hinders your experience or expression of your spirituality?

- 'Missing worship services'.
- 'Reluctance or failing to talk more about the Lord and making Him known to others'.
- 'My own fallibility'.
- 'Illogical thinking by other people'.
- 'My mobility and speech'.

Q7: What surprises you about being older?

- 'That I am as fit as I am, and still enjoy life and partaking in sport'.
- 'Being older does not surprise me. What does surprise me is the unfailing patience of those who care for us old folk'.
- 'Nothing surprises me. I am accepting life as it comes along'.
- 'How little I know, or, how much I do not know'.
- 'Being helpless'.
- 'Illness'.

Q8: Who or what offers you the most spiritual support these days?

- 'Worship services on television'.
- 'Daily prayer'.
- 'Church and church services'.
- 'The residential home'.
- 'Being with some very old or crippled people and seeing how they cope and their attitude to their own infirmity'.
- 'Friendship. My minister from my church. Services in the Home'.
- 'My family is my precious support'.

Q9: Is there anything else you would like to say?

- 'I often sit and wonder if I've lived life as God would have wanted.'
- 'I recall almost all the time the wonderful memories of my marriage to a very wonderful lady for nearly 54 years and the lovely children and grandchildren we have.'
- 'I am bewildered that life still offers so much, even at my advanced age.'
- 'Since the death of my wife, my faith has increased and not decreased, because I think thoughts of God, more now than before.'
- 'I shall carry on. Still a lot of good people around, such as those I have met at this Home.'

It is not easy to make generalisations from these responses. However, we can highlight particular words and phrases that are intriguing or that appear several times:

Communion with God

God's creation

God is there

Faith in God

Church

Worship services

Helping others

Friendship

Family

Memories

Continuity

Being helpless

Wonder

Bewildered

Surprised

I shall carry on

What these words and phrases suggest is that, at least for some older men in residential homes, God is real and really experienced. In addition, contact with other people (family, friends) is important, as are church or other worship services. Life still contains surprises and evokes wonder, and irrespective of age, many older men continue to accept life and look forward to each day.

Analysis

Earlier in this report,¹³ we identified six themes that predominate in the literature. From the postal survey and the interviews, we wanted to learn whether these themes would be discussed by the men when asked about their spirituality. All six themes were, in fact, discussed by the men, although this may have been as much a factor of direct questioning on these subjects as the men's desire to talk about them. However, what the men said often emphasised aspects of these broad themes other than those highlighted in the literature. And, in some cases, what they said contradicted ideas found in the literature. Examining the themes one at a time, we learn the following:

Being a man

This generation of men had very traditional masculine roles socially and within the family. None of them brought up any concerns regarding struggles with this. Some of them acknowledged that society and its expectations have changed in recent years, but this has not directly affected them. Sexuality and the body were not discussed, with the single important exception of illness, disability, and infirmity, all of which were of concern.¹⁴ The decline of strength and bodily functioning are not much discussed in the literature, but are significant for older men. Having an older body is a reality that cannot be avoided.

Fatherhood

Only a few men mentioned their fathers, and the references were either positive or neutral. No one discussed having a damaged relationship with his father, or unresolved issues. Several of the men did discuss being fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, and took pride in their generations of offspring. Because the literature does not discuss older age in depth, it does not explore the role of the very old man within his family.

Friendship

Many of the older men in this study have succeeded in establishing close, intimate, sharing friendships—sometimes with men, and sometimes with older women. In the residential homes, male friendships may be more often one-to-one rather than in groups, due to the small number of male residents at any given Home. Nevertheless, the aspiration of the literature is lived by these older men. Where such friendships are lacking (e.g. Mr Anderson), loneliness is acutely felt. Indeed, loneliness, even within a community of fellow residents, was a common theme among the interviewees. There is sufficient solitude for thinking one's own thoughts and recalling memories, but not always enough people (or the "right" people) to listen to stories or hear deeper concerns.

¹³ See p. 9-11.

¹⁴ This does not mean that sexuality is not important to older men. It may have well been that the interviewees did not wish to discuss the subject with a younger, female researcher.

Spirituality

For those men in the study who are practising Christians, the Bible and the teachings of the church are key components of their spirituality. Coming into relationship with God was possible: Mr Baker experienced it in taking communion, Mr Anderson by reading his hymn book, Mr Collins by preparing sermons, Mr Davis by meditating on his relationship with Jesus. From the postal survey responses, there was also a widespread sense of awe and wonder regarding nature, creation, and the universe. Lastly, death and what follows it are certainly of concern to some very old male residents. For example, Mr Elliott's spirituality is dominated by thoughts of reuniting with his late wife in the afterlife.

The church

Many of the respondents in this study have strong ties to their local church. In fact, some of them gain a great deal from their churchgoing, and none of them mentioned too many women, of any age, being present there. Some of the men who no longer attend church miss it greatly and find that services in the Home, however good they are, can never replace the experience of going to church.

Work

The interviewees' experience of having retired crossed the range from regret and loss (Mr Anderson) to not looking back (Mr Elliott) to, in Mr Collins's case, still being engaged in his vocation. This range was also reflected in the postal survey (see page 19, Q4). This needs further exploration to see what bearing it might have on spirituality.

Also in the "Literature" section of this report, we noted the importance of MHA's working definition of spirituality ('what gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being') and the leaflet 'Recognising People's Spiritual Needs'.¹⁵ The pilot study's respondents told us that there are definitely sources of continuing meaning and purpose in their lives. The key things they identified as providing nourishment for life's ongoing journey are *friendship, conversation, God, and church*. Both in the postal survey and in the interviews, these were the recurring themes. I would suggest that, for this sample of men, these themes are the "what" in MHA's working definition of spirituality.

¹⁵ See p. 11.

With respect to the six needs of older people that the leaflet names, we saw each of these arise in the research and relate to the above four themes:

- **Companionship/Friendship:**

The men experienced powerful feelings of loneliness and isolation when these were not present.

- **Affirmation:**

Feeling valued, loved, and useful—as a friend, a grandfather, a resident—were important to the men.

- **Celebration:**

The men wished to share the high points of their past lives via memories and mementoes, as well as to share the good news and special occasions of today.

- **Confirmation:**

The men sought space in their relationships and in their churchgoing to express/experience faith worries and doubts and to be reassured.

- **Reconciliation:**

Being able to make peace with oneself, with others, and with God was touched upon by some of the respondents.

- **Integration:**

Particularly for the interviewees, there was an overwhelming need for someone to listen as they tried to pull all the pieces of life together.

Foregrounding these six needs and the themes of friendship, conversation, God, and church would seem to be of much more direct use in understanding the spirituality of older men in MHA's Care Homes than would the texts on male spirituality reviewed for this project.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This was a small pilot study based on five interviews and 19 completed postal surveys; therefore too much should not be read into these findings. Nevertheless, the study did meet its objective: to improve understandings of the spirituality of older men from a Christian perspective in order to help MHA Care Group and the Church recognise and support spiritual expression in older men.

While the themes which are most commonly mentioned in the literature on male spirituality were relevant to these older men, they were nuanced by the factors of older age and living in a residential home. There are both positive and negative aspects to each of these factors. For example, more time to enjoy friends and family often coincides with an increase in the number of bereavements; freedom from household pressures and responsibilities is exchanged for less independence and reduced privacy. Therefore, it seems more useful to compare these findings with texts on the spirituality of ageing.

Additionally, four strong themes emerged from the empirical research: friendship, conversation, God, and church. For the participants in this study, these four elements were important – even critical – factors in their spiritual well-being. In simple and direct terms, this is how the four elements fit into a scheme of factors that help or hinder spiritual expression:

Helps spiritual expression

- Memories and mementoes.
- Regular worship services in the Home.
- Friendships with men and women.
- Conversation on meaningful subjects.
- Attending church services.
- Fellowship with other Christians.
- Family.
- Time to think/reflect.
- Prayer.
- Music.
- Bible and hymn book.

Hinders spiritual expression

- Lack of other men (residents, staff, visitors) "on the same wavelength" to chat with.
- Lack of companionship from outside the Home.
- Not feeling free to discuss faith worries or doubts.
- Not attending church services.
- Physical restrictions (e.g. sight, hearing, speech, mobility, pain).
- Illness.
- Isolation (emotional, practical).
- Loneliness (i.e. feeling friendless).

We need to recognise that most residents view old age and residential care as second best to being younger and living independently; therefore, this limits both their and MHA's ability to meet their spiritual needs. However, the above scheme does offer ideas for consideration.

Recommendations for MHA

As part of ensuring that the spiritual needs of residents are met, MHA aims to provide holistic, person-centred care. Home Managers and care staff discuss residents' spiritual needs and how these can be met and incorporated into each resident's Care Plan and their daily care.

Each of MHA's Care Homes has a Chaplain. Traditionally this role has been filled by the local Methodist minister, but increasingly Chaplains are drawn from other denominations and several are lay people. Chaplains are involved in leading and organising regular acts of worship in the Home as well as being available pastorally to residents and staff.

We hope this pilot study will contribute towards further developing MHA's understanding of how best to meet spiritual needs, and we offer the following recommendations.

Home Managers

Questions Home Managers could ask prospective, new, and existing male residents, as men, about their spirituality include:

- Do you have a local church? Or, would you like to attend a local church?
- What work did you do before retirement? Do you keep in contact with that organisation or with former work associates?
- Do you belong to any clubs or groups of men?
- What hobbies did you (or do you) enjoy? How do you enjoy spending your time?
- What significant losses or bereavements have you had in your life?
- What are you looking forward to (or, hoping to gain) from living here?

Additionally, Home Managers can encourage all male staff, not just care staff, to interact with male residents.

Care staff

What could be incorporated, with respect to spirituality and spiritual needs, into a resident's care plan?

- Talk about key people in their lives, some of whom may live away or be deceased. Share memories. Ask about grandchildren.
- Get all staff (including maintenance, grounds, and kitchen staff) involved in conversations with male residents.
- Listen for deep concerns, which may only be hinted at. Try to draw out men who are shy, without being intrusive.

Activities Coordinators

Consider incorporating some of the following into existing activities programmes:

- Take residents to places where they can enjoy nature.
- Bring nature "indoors" to housebound residents.
- Arrange for visits from local churches, schools, children, and pets.
- Provide books on tape and tape players.
- Start a men's discussion group with coffee and conversation, bringing in men from the local community to join the residents.
- Chat about having a father, being a father, and being the "patriarch" of a family.
- Start a "current events" discussion group with men and women.
- Encourage male residents to use this report (or summaries of it) as the basis of a discussion group or memoir-writing exercise.

Chaplains

Consider the following issues when planning worship services and visits to see what might be incorporated:

- Vary the level at which sermons and talks are pitched in order to offer something for everyone over the course of time.
- Be prepared to engage one-to-one with residents who have a higher educational or intellectual level, and expect to be challenged.
- Be prepared to discuss death and the afterlife in non-judgemental and non-prescriptive terms.
- Be prepared to discuss regrets, satisfactions, and "What have I (or haven't I) done with my life?" questions.
- Encourage older men to discuss their faith/spiritual questions.

Volunteers

With the many demands on staff members' time and energy, volunteers are a key support for both staff and residents. Home Managers, Care Staff, Activities Coordinators, and Chaplains will want to include volunteers as they consider whether and how to implement the suggestions here.

Recommendations for churches

The men who participated in this study indicated that belonging to a local church – however that is worked out in practice – is important to them. Therefore, churches should recognise that not all needs for fellowship, companionship, and friendship are met within a residential home. Are older men from residential homes included in church fellowship groups and house groups? Also, clergy and church members alike are encouraged to invite male residents to their own homes or to a local cafe for a meal or for coffee or tea; and, like Mr Baker, some residents might enjoy a trip to the local pub for a pint!

Recommendations for further study

As this report is being written, US researchers Janet Ramsey and Rosemary Blieszner are completing a study of older men's spirituality and resiliency, which is itself a follow-on from their earlier work with older women. Their report should be available in early 2005 and will offer a basis of comparison between these findings and that of a concurrent study.¹⁶ Other recommended reading, available now, is noted in the bibliography. Finally, it may be helpful to seek out indirect texts (e.g. journals, diaries, and autobiographies such as Toynbee (1988)) for insights into the spirituality of older British men.

Looking ahead to future generations of older men, we must remember that their experiences and ideas about spirituality and ageing (as with everything else) will be different from those of the men studied here. As ideas from the US cross the Atlantic to the UK over time, future male residents of MHA's Care Homes may relate to issues raised by the US-based literature. Therefore, research will have to continue and ideas altered to reflect these changes.

There is no single path to follow. We must make many investigations in order to understand and perhaps, just possibly, generalise about older men's spirituality. A small study such as this is a beginning and perhaps leaves us with more questions than we began with. Readers of this report are invited to reflect on what is offered here and to share with MHA Care Group their own experiences, ideas, and discoveries.

¹⁶ For details, see: www.humandevlopment.vt.edu/spiritualityandresiliency.html.

Appendix One:

Project considerations

Ethics

This research presented no major ethical problems. A number of basic ethical principles nevertheless were observed:

- *Informed consent.* All elements of the project were disclosed from the outset, and participants had the right to give and withdraw their consent at any time.
- *Protection of participants.* Participants' wishes were supported at all times.
- *Confidentiality and anonymity.* All materials produced by the project (written or otherwise) guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of participants unless prior agreement was reached. All names used in this report are pseudonyms and personal details have been disguised.

Staffing and Steering Group

A researcher, Janet Eldred, was appointed to work on the project. She was responsible for undertaking the literature review, designing the questions for the postal survey and face-to-face interviews, undertaking the interviews, data analysis and writing the final report. Guidance and support came from a Steering Group, which met three times during the course of the study as well as having regular email contact.

The Group comprised:

Keith Albans, Group Director - Chaplaincy & Spirituality, MHA Care Group (overall responsibility for the project);

Anna Marshall-Day, Company Secretary, MHA Care Group;

Lizzie McLennan, Policy and Information Assistant, MHA Care Group (administrative assistance);

Keith Salisbury, Group and Charity Board member, MHA Care Group; and

John Bland, retired Methodist minister.

Appendix Two:

Men's Political and Social Movements

Not one but several men's political and social movements have been identified: the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, the Feminist Men's Movement, Fathers Rights¹⁷ and Men's Rights groups, the Christian Men's Movement, the Men's Recovery Movement, and the Fatherhood Movement.¹⁸ The following two movements provided the dominant sources of ideas for this study and a source of material to critique:

Mythopoetic Men's Movement

Followers of this movement are inclined to be socially liberal, religiously and spiritually inclusive and tolerant, and apolitical. The movement tends to focus on helping individual men resolve their own inner issues. Its name comes from the two main sources of its imagery: mythical archetypes and poetry.

Christian Men's Movement

Followers of this movement are inclined to be politically and socially conservative, prescriptive, and evangelical in outlook and action. They favour traditional masculine roles and reject feminist ideas. In general, the Christian Men's Movement is more established in the US, and many of the ideas have yet to reach and influence thinking in Britain.

Books, Articles, and Websites

Biddulph (2004) writes from within the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. Stating that most men are malfunctioning as human beings and as men, he describes a programme whereby men can work their way to wholeness. His seven steps to manhood include repairing the relationship with one's father, being an actively engaged father oneself, learning how to make real male friendships, and finding a spirituality based in nature. He is a strong proponent of men's groups as a source of connection and support.

Three texts within the Christian Men's Movement are McCartney (1992), Beltz (1993), and Hicks (1993). McCartney consists of short (1-2 pages) stories from various contributors, showing how they overcame bad habits and sinful lives to lead a better life with Christ. Beltz is modelled on the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve-step programme for recovery. It is aggressive and uncompromising. Hicks matches six Hebrew words with six stages of the male life journey. It is a much more intellectual read than the other two books.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Fathers 4 Justice, a UK fathers' rights group, was very prominent during the period when this study was undertaken, with "invasions" of York Minster, Parliament, and Buckingham Palace. Refer to their website, www.fathers-4-justice.org.

¹⁸ This list is from a US source: "What are Mens [sic] Issues? A survey, by David R. Throop" (www.menweb.org/throop/history/accounts/throop5.html). [Accessed 29 April 2004].

Arnold (1991) selects several Old Testament male figures (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah) and uses them to illustrate several key masculine archetypes (e.g. patriarch and pilgrim, warrior and magician, prophet), then concludes with presenting Jesus as the biblical figure who incorporates all masculine archetypes. Arnold's book combines imagery from the Mythopoetic Movement with the anti-feminism of the Christian Men's Movement in a scholarly argument from one standpoint.¹⁹

Nelson (1992) writes primarily about sexual dynamics and the male bodily experience and how these influence or create a masculine spirituality. Although he touches on the issues of bodily change and vulnerability, including death, he does not spend enough time on these to help us consider their relevance to an older man's spirituality.

James (1996) provides an interesting overview of various authors' ideas about masculine spirituality, without taking a particular stance himself. He points out the impact of patriarchy and its issues (e.g. dualism, hierarchy, power, aloneness) on the development of masculine spirituality, but also discusses the need for men to integrate feeling, intuition, emotions, and the unconscious in order to develop that spirituality to its fullest expression.

The following are all conservative, evangelical organisations with a presence on the Internet:

Promise Keepers (PK)

This movement/organisation began in the US in 1990. Their history includes national gatherings of millions of men as well as much grassroots work in local churches.²⁰ Their work is too recent to have been an influence on the men of this study.

Christian Men's Network (CMN)

Not as high profile as PK. Interestingly, CMN 'held our first ever fully domestic Maximised Manhood Event in the UK' in May 2004.²¹

The Full Gospel Business Mens [sic] Fellowship International (FGBMFI)

Conservative evangelical movement that is internet-based (i.e. no churches or pastors).²²

¹⁹ A Christian feminist critique of Arnold (and Richard Rohr) is provided by Knuth (1993). See Knuth, Elizabeth T., 1993, "'Male Spirituality": A Feminist Evaluation' (<http://www.users.csbsju.edu/~eknuth/xpax/malespir.html>). [Accessed 24 May 2003.]

²⁰ Refer to their website, www.promisekeepers.org, for a full history and listing of the 7 Promises.

²¹ Refer to their website, www.cmnworld.com/news/international/cmnuuk.php.

²² Refer to their website, www.fgbmfi.org.uk.

Christian Association of PrimeTimers (CAP)

Created in 1994 'as a response to the need for an organisation that represented the values and morals of Christian seniors in America',²³ CAP's focus appears to be more on providing discounted benefits and services (i.e. capturing the grey dollar) than on ministry and mission.

Finally, *New Man* is a bi-monthly US magazine that rests squarely in the Christian Men's movement. The tenth anniversary issue (July/August 2004) highlighted ten men whom it deemed were most significant in the past ten years. Interestingly, the top choice was not an individual 'but an entire generation who finally got their due in the 1990s: The men who fought for us in World War II'.²⁴ An article available on the Internet, entitled 'The Rage Against Age',²⁵ examined the "sins" of ageism and asked, 'Will younger Christian men use their power to call forth the father in the older men? And will the older Christian men lay aside their anxieties about ageing and get to the business of healing their younger brothers?' It concludes with the hope that 'Christian men would lead this cultural revolution – to return dignity and honour to the second half of life'.

²³ Refer to their website, www.christianprimetimers.org.

²⁴ Stephen Mansfield, 'Men of the Decade', *New Man*, July/August 2004, pp 26-36.

²⁵ See www.newmanmag.com/article.php?sid=397. By Brian Peterson. [Accessed 25 June 2004.]

Appendix Three:

Postal Survey and Interview Schedule

Postal Survey

Section One

Please answer the following questions choosing one of the five available responses:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

1. I get support from my friendships with other men.
2. As I get older, the spiritual aspects of life become more important.
3. Working and providing for my family were important to me.
4. Retirement from paid work changed my sense of who I am.
5. Living in a residential home has made it easier to practice my faith.
6. As I get older, church has become less important to me.
7. I enjoy having time on my own, to think my own thoughts.
8. During my lifetime, it has become harder to be a man in our society.
9. The image of God as Father is important to me.

Have you read anything that has either reinforced or changed how you think about your own spirituality? If so, what have you read?

Section Two

Please answer the following questions using the lines provided. Please use extra paper for your answers if you need more space.

1. To me, spirituality means:
2. What fills you with awe or a sense of wonder?
3. What would you most like to be remembered for?
4. What is the key principle by which you live your life today?
5. What helps you experience or express your spirituality?
6. What hinders your experience or expression of your spirituality?
7. What surprises you about being older?
8. Who or what offers you the most spiritual support these days?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Would you be willing to be interviewed in person by the independent researcher on this project, who will ask you questions about your spirituality? YES [or] NO

Interview Schedule

What is spirituality?

Let's begin by establishing what we're talking about in this interview. Here is MHA's definition of spirituality: "What gives continuing meaning and purpose to a person's life and nourishes their inner being".

- What do you think of that?

Other definitions of spirituality include:

- > "Nothing less than the whole of life orientated towards God, shaped by God, graced by God."
- > "An approach to God."
- > "An appreciation of the mysteries and depths of human experience."
- > "A personal quest to find meaning and purpose in life."
- > "Harmonious interconnectedness."

- What do you think about any of these?

Do you like the word "spirituality", or do you prefer to use another word to describe what we're talking about?

Besides the postal survey you recently completed, is there anything in recent months or years that has focused your thoughts on spirituality?

- Please tell me about it.

Begin exploring the answers to the postal survey

In the postal survey, you said that: _____.

- Would you elaborate on this?

You mentioned that reading _____ was important to you.

- Tell me about this.

About work and retirement

What work did you do before you retired?

- Do you recall any significant events? (e.g. promotion, sacking, unemployment, awards, etc.)
- What did working mean to you?

Tell me about your retirement.

- What sorts of things did you do at first?
- Were you married then?
- What do you do now?

In the postal survey, you said that being retired [has/has not] changed your sense of who you are.

- Would you say more about this?

In the postal survey, you said that you [do/don't] like to have time to yourself.

- How do you use this time?

What portion of your time do you spend thinking about:

- the past?
- the present?
- the future?

When you were working, did you belong to any groups of men that met or socialised regularly, such as work mates, sports team-mates, church groups, or pub/working-men's-club friends?

- Tell me about that experience.
- What about friends from military service/National Service?
- Have you attended any reunions of any of these, or of schoolmates?

Do you belong to anything similar now?

- What do you talk about?
- What do you gain from this?
- What do you contribute to the group?
- (If not, do you wish you did?)

Abstract questions

Have there been times in your life when you were awe-struck or filled with a sense of wonder?

- Please tell me about them.

What would you most like to be remembered for?

- Why?

What is the key principle by which you live your life today?

When are you most at peace with yourself?

When do you feel most happy?

What do you most value?

Whom do you most admire?

Who are (or were) your spiritual mentors?

Some people say that we should never have any uncertainties or doubts about our faith. What do you say?

What do you hope for, for yourself?

More about spirituality

At the beginning, we talked about what spirituality means, and you said:

-
- When are the times you feel this way? (or similar question)
 - Are there things that get in the way of your experiencing this?
 - What would help you overcome these frustrations?

How important are the spiritual aspects of life to you these days?

Who or what offers you the most spiritual support these days?

Church-related questions

What part has the church played in your life, and what part have you played in the church?

How do you "do" church now? Where is "church" for you these days?

- At the residential home?
- At a church/chapel building?
- How often do you attend services or meetings?

Does your church care for the spiritual needs you mentioned?

- [How/how not]?

Do you think that there is anything specific about being male that makes it easier / harder / different to engage with the church?

- How might this be different from the past?

How could the church better support you in your spiritual life (particularly if you can't get to church)?

- How might it be more effective at appealing to older men generally?

Being a man, having and being a father

What's it like being an older man in our society?

- From what you can recall, is this different for you from the way it was for your father?
(Continue to discuss his father/family, if appropriate.)

Why does the image of God as Father have particular meaning for you?

What advice would you give to a younger man, such as your son or grandson?

At the end of every interview:

Is there anything else you would like to say about anything we've talked about?

Would you please confirm:

- Your age _____
- Your marital status _____
- How long you have lived here _____
- Your faith / church affiliation (if any) _____
- May I use your statements in my report? _____
- May I contact you again if I need to clarify anything? _____

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A Telling Minority

Spirituality of Older Men

Older men are a minority

This statement is true both in British society and in MHA's Care Homes. According to the 2001 Census, men comprise only 32.5% of the population aged 80 and over, only 27.6% of the population aged 85 and over, and just 22.4% of the population aged 90 and over.

Several questions lie at the heart of this study: is men's spirituality different from women's spirituality? Is older men's spirituality different from that of younger men? And, is older men's spirituality different from that of older women? While it is beyond the scope of this research to examine these questions in detail, our assumption in undertaking this study was that such differences do exist.

The research explored the spirituality of selected older men living in MHA's Care Homes, some of whom partake in regular prayer and Bible study meetings. Data collection involved a literature review, a postal survey, and semi-structured interviews.

