

## **Celebrating the “Third Age”: a study topic for Teams**

### **Introduction**

This study topic has arisen out of a concern about the aging profile of Team membership in Australia. It was first suggested that it should be called “The Golden Years” but it was pointed out to us that not all people as they age are in fact having a “golden” experience of life as it were and that a more generic, less value laden term be used such as “The Third Age”. We agree with this and have changed the topic accordingly. If you would prefer to use the former then this is fine. A significant proportion of Teams members (and Teams as a whole) are in the “Third Age” within Western culture.

As a part of this many members who have held important, instrumental leadership roles and have set up the whole movement in Australia are in the twilight of their involvement in Teams. Many such Teams have lost members and of course have handed over to younger Teams to provide the leadership of the Movement. Along with this and within the context of our seriously “agist” society in Australia and perhaps the whole of Western culture, we seem to have lost sight as a Movement (to a lesser degree) of the many challenges for growth and further self and couple actualisation that there are at this stage of our development. For us as a Movement there is the challenge to continue to animate all our couples, including those in the “Third Age” so that we have a more fully inclusive movement of vibrant people, vibrant couples, and vibrant teams.

The list that follows was sent to us by one of the people commenting on the study topic: “In “Naomi’s Guide to Aging Gratefully” (p76) she tells us about the following: Col Sanders started Kentucky Chicken at 65 and sold it at 74; Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim Museum at 90; Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals at 78; Monet began painting his waterlilies at 76; Barbara McLintock won the Nobel prize for medicine at 81; Leopold Stokowski signed a 6 year recording contract at age 94. Life fitness coach Richard Leider in his book “Claiming your place in the Fire” asks: “What would you be doing if you were ten times more courageous in the second half of your life than you were in the first?” We believe that these things are worth pondering over.

### **Process for the development of the topic**

Our role when we developed this topic was as the SA Regional Couple who had the role of providing leadership in the area of Formation for the Oceania Team. In reviewing the formation of couples in Teams, we came to the conclusion that most formation actually results from the monthly meeting in the Base Team. Most older couples have become less involved in the wider Teams Movement and other formative experiences and as such if we were to be able to reach older couples aged more than 65 years (about 35%- 40% of Teams members), then we would have to reach them through the Base Team meeting. Thus we decided that a specific study topic that could be of interest to older couples would be one way of offering them “formation”, which is one of the main aims of the Movement. This of course does not mean that other study topics are inappropriate, just

that there is a need for an option for age-specific study topics because there are different things that challenge couples in different ways as we journey through life. People need the option to choose study topics that are of all types: spiritual, prayer, social justice, the couple, sexual relationships, the Charisms or the Endeavours, the letters from Fr Caffarel, those developed by individual Teams, on CD or the Web, etc. We also need specific topics that are really “close to home” as it were, those that deal with our current phase of life so that we can reflect upon the things that are actually of greatest personal concern to us right now, day by day.

As such we wrote a series of topics based on the challenges inherent in growing older and inevitably having to face our own and our spouse’s death; challenging and close to home! Because of this we asked a number of teams to volunteer during the Brisbane Teams Gathering and some seven Teams from the ACT, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide have commented upon (2) or actually completed the Topic (5). They were asked to provide detailed comments if they wished to, as individuals or as a group. Most commented upon each session and we are most grateful for all their comments. This version of the study topic has taken these comments and incorporated most of them into this second version of the topic. Some of the most useful comments have come about additional resources that could be useful to enhance the topic. These have been incorporated as options for people to use if they so choose. As a result of the feedback we have added a topic specifically on loss and grief which comes into a number of sessions in smaller ways. It is clearly a topic that is important and universal as people age. Basically the topic can be done over seven meetings and one introductory session or people can extend it to twelve as they go through, because the feedback was that a number of the sessions could usefully have been extended to two meetings for the one topic. It is probably best if the introduction of the topic is done as the first session so that everyone is aware that to get the most out of it a reasonable amount of time needs to be spent on the “sitting down”. Two of the trial teams used 7 meetings (one for feedback) and two used 8, extending at least one of the sessions into two meetings. Any Team doing the topic that wishes to comment or suggest additional materials, or to provide negative comment (if the topic upsets you then there will be others similarly affected and we want to learn how better to present these issues for people), we would like to hear from you ([rgpols@tpg.com.au](mailto:rgpols@tpg.com.au)).

After we made the changes, we sent them back for further comment and two more significant changes were made: firstly we changed the title “The Third Age” and secondly we thought the suggestion that at the end of the sequence of study topics a celebration of life would be a fitting response. We agree with that and have added eighth session.

### **The process of each session**

Our belief is that Jesus is constantly calling each one of us to “Come follow me” (Mark 1:17). This is so irrespective of age or situation. It is true especially when we are reflecting on our lives, conscious of the presence of God, as we do at each Team meeting. This assumption underlies the whole process and purpose of this study topic.

In order to make all of us aware of this daily call, this study topic uses one of the principles defined by the Fathers of the second Vatican Council where we were asked to “discern the signs of the times” as one way of discovering God’s call to us. In this study topic the subject is we, our relationships, our whole lives and the future: the last stage of our human potential and growth. The process is one of reflection on us, our couple relationship and the ways in which we have lived our lives up to this point. In this examination of our lives we will find “the signs of the times” because we live in the context of time and space and there has been much change in the world during our lifetime. So the first component of the topic is this guided reflection which systematically examines the developmental challenges that confront us in the third age of our lives.

The method that we have used is the discipline of Teams where we reflect upon our lives, pray about it and use the process of “sitting down” to share our thoughts and feelings with our spouse to make our individual reflections concrete, to put them in words, to learn more about ourselves and each other and also to pray together. In doing so, this study topic asks us to do this reflection “in the light of the Gospels” (we have used readings other than the Gospels also as prompts to the teachings of Jesus) and there are a range of readings for each topic that you are asked to choose from as one may be more relevant to you than another. It is not meant for all of them to be used. We would encourage people to select other readings, or contemplative materials relevant to the topic under discussion, if they would like to. Be free to use the topic as a guide, (not an order, instruction or command) and to shape it yourselves to meet your needs and your interests. Finally there is the sharing of this with the rest of the Team at the Team meeting where we are repeatedly being asked to do this study topic for the purpose of discerning God’s call to us at this time, as an individual; as a couple, collectively as a Team and for our Church and society?

We have been very conscious about our Spiritual Counsellors, widows, widowers and those separated or divorced; or those who may have a spouse who is unwell and unable to participate fully or at all. We suggest that for the process of “sitting down”, that you use a reflective diary format to write your own thoughts and you could address a letter to your spouse, God, the Team or simply the diary. At the Team meeting we need to be particularly sensitive to be inclusive of singles as loss and grief are realities for increasing numbers of Team’s members, if not all of us, as we age.

### **The Readings**

The choice of readings has been quite idiosyncratic and has been added to by comments from those who have trialled the program. Most are from the New Testament and there are a few from the Old Testament. It was suggested that a number of other readings be included from Kahlil Gibran. Gibran was born in Lebanon in 1883 and died in the US in 1931. He was a Maronite Christian, novelist and poet and we considered them to be thought evoking and very appropriate. There is no sense that Gibran is meant to be

competitive with or equated with the Biblical readings of course. There are many other readings that could also have been chosen and people may wish to suggest others.

The readings are not meant for participants to labour over. The range of them is deliberately wide so that people can choose perhaps one or more that help them to consider their responses being aware of the presence of God in this process of reflection as Teams. The study topic is one of the Endeavours of Teams where we are asked to reflect on what we study “in the light of the gospel”. This principle was enunciated during Vatican II as a way to help us to discern the presence of the Spirit in our everyday lives and we consider that is an essential part of the purpose of the study topic at each team meeting. So the readings are meant to facilitate reflection. People should feel free to use other readings should they wish to in achieving the same end.

### **Challenges for us in our “Third Age”**

Dr Erik Erickson, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, in his book *Childhood and Society* describes “the eight ages of man”. He sees the final stage of human development as having the basic challenge of maintaining “ego integrity” as opposed to living in “despair”. By this he means that at this stage of personal development there are developmental tasks that are yet to be done for us all to grow to our potential. These are some of the challenges that confront us as we grow older and learn to face the end of life:

1. In Family Life
  - Children leave home and establish their own lives.
  - Birth of grandchildren
  - Our extended family.
2. Our Couple Relationship
  - Illness and disability in ourselves or in our spouse.
  - Maintaining an intimate, loving relationship.
  - Hurts, disappointments and barriers.
  - Our memories as a couple.
3. Life at Work
  - Retirement: a blessing or a curse?
  - Living with a decrease in income.
  - Our home; leaving and “downsizing”
  - Our dreams about retirement; realising them.
4. Personal Growth
  - Review our lives: highlights and challenges.
  - My personal faith.
  - Review of us as a couple: highlights and challenges.
  - Our couple spirituality.
  - Handing on of our faith, values and acquired wisdom.

- Our involvement in Teams: highlights and challenges
5. Loss and grief
    - Loss of roles, home and work
    - Loss of health, frailty and deteriorating function
    - Loss of spouse or child
    - Anticipatory grief
    - Stages of grief and resolution
  6. Facing Our Mortality
    - Life after death: the unknowable.
    - What would Jesus say?
    - Letting go of life: challenges
  7. The celebration of my Life (Or our lives)
    - How would you like to be remembered?
    - How would you like your life to be celebrated?
    - Saying goodbye to friends
    - Involvement in Teams; highlights and challenges now.
    - Celebrating our lives now: what is on my/our “bucket list
  8. The celebration of us as a Team

As can be seen from this summary of the issues that are raised when we start to think about the final stage of human growth as described by Erickson, it can be seen that there are a lot of challenges. For some they may see it as depressing and something that would not be suitable as a study topic. Yet others could see it as liberating to consider the completion of one’s life in the company of one’s friends in Teams.

### **Using this Study Topic**

In doing these sessions, we suggest that you spend some of the time before the sit down to fill in some of the spaces we have left in the text for the purpose of making some notes for *your individual reflection*. In doing this, you may find it interesting to get out some of your photo albums if you have them. If not, this topic is an opportunity to honour the photos and the events that gave rise to them and review them (and perhaps mount them into an album like you had been intending to), recalling and reminiscing about all these important things in which you have participated. Some may even like to make a scrapbook, or photo-album with annotations, to share not only with your Team but also with your family, or simply for posterity.

It is likely that if you do this in “*the sitting down*” (it may take more than a 10 minute sit down just before the meeting) with some level of seriousness, that this will bring back many things, events and your memories of them; good and not so good. We would suggest that this may give rise for you as individuals and or as a couple for these memories to evoke in you *a prayerful response* and so we also ask you to consider all

these issues “in the light of the Gospels”. We have selected some readings that you may wish to consider in this process. Feel free to select your *own response in prayer* and consider *sharing this with the Team* or use it as an exercise in *Conjugal Prayer* that you may wish to share at some time with the family. It could be a novel way of using it as a circular letter at Christmas or as a birthday card for someone that you have made rather than bought. As can be seen it is the sort of topic that could be extended and people could take 2 meetings per topic or indeed for any one topic if you find that more time would be useful. A similar exercise could be done by the Team; such as making a scrapbook or adding to “Team photo-albums”. Again such an exercise will need discussion and planning if it is going to be done.

### **Responding to the Study Topic**

Some of the challenges posed which extend beyond the Team meeting, are a response that individuals, couples or a Team may wish to make. There is clearly no suggestion or obligation for anyone to feel that these suggestions should or must be followed or that if you don't follow them you are not doing the topic properly or well. These activities are not things that anyone would do normally, however the topic is such that it particularly lends itself to these sorts of responses which, without consideration people may later regret leaving undone.

There is also a further challenge for each Team as you do these sessions and that is you become aware of the role that Teams has played in your lives. Again this may invoke in you a prayerful response and we would encourage you to follow that through. You may even wish to join the “Intercesseurs” also founded by Fr Caffarel, who have an international permanent 24 hour vigil of prayer for Teams and for marriage (*The Intercessors* email [intercesseurs@wanadoo.fr](mailto:intercesseurs@wanadoo.fr); Website ; <http://www.intercesseurs.org>; postal Intercesseurs END 49, Rue de la Glaciere 75013 Paris). Or perhaps The friends of Fr Caffarel ([www.henri-caffarel.org](http://www.henri-caffarel.org) 49 Rue de la Glaciere, F-75013 Paris)

We also hope that you may wish to make an action response where you would be willing to return to being actively involved in the wider Movement if indeed you are no longer so involved. This may be by writing to the editors of the Sector Newsletter about the topic, coming to the “Charter Mass” in December, crossroads, or other Teams activities, or even recruiting a child, grandchild, niece or nephew or two, into the Teams Movement. You might like to show them the album you put together doing this topic and telling them about it when they come to see you some time. Your presence at the activities of the wider Movement is also a powerful witness that supports and challenges us all. As a Team you may also wish to make some more specific response that is different than any of the above.

Finally, all responses to any study topic are highly individual. God calls us to “Come follow me” (Mark 1:17) in many and unique ways and your way is your own and no one else's business. We hope that you enjoy the topic as the seven Teams that have trialled it have done thus far.

## **Session 1: Family life in the Third Age (consider using 2 meetings for this session)**

### **Introduction**

This is the first of 8 study topics which enable us to examine where we are at in our own lives at this time. Any time from our fifties onwards, or if we have a significant chronic illness, we start to think about the sorts of developmental issues that are systematically addressed in these sessions. Erik Erickson saw this as one of the great developmental growth stages in our lives where we start to look back and evaluate what we have done, what our hopes were and where we still want to go in life. At this time we have an increasing awareness of the fact that we are not as young as we were, that retirement issues or living through retirement, are things we must consider and that we have already started to experience the death or serious illness of friends, colleagues and/or the breakdown of marriage relationships.

At the same time there is a powerful challenge for us to grow and become who we can be even though that this is something that few people talk about. Developmental psychologists talk about the stages of child development and the tasks and challenges that for example adolescents face. Those in the Third Age of their lives, also have challenges that need to be met and overcome if they are to reach their full potential; Jesus said: "I came that they might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). There is a need for us to come to terms with these facts of life, to confront them and to achieve mastery over the challenges and to enjoy this time to the full if we are going to have a healthy older age.

In this topic we will examine the changes that occur in the family as we grow older.

### **Children grow up and leave**

As we grow older, our children leave home and we are left with what has been described as an "empty nest". We watch our children living their own lives, sometimes from afar and sometimes when they stumble and fall only to return home to "lick their wounds" as it were. We wonder about our roles in their lives and their growth and development. They hurt, suffer triumph and blossom. We can only stand at a distance as they get on with their tasks and their growth. There is loss and grief in this and also the vindication of our efforts and triumph, as well as dispassionate observation as the next generation "does its own thing".

*Jot down the initials of each of your children, think about each in turn and focus on one or two joys and sorrows that they have brought into your life.*

*If you are a spiritual counsellor, or you have not had children, perhaps note those people in the next generation who have been really important to you. Again jot down the joys and sorrows that they have brought into your life.*

### **Joys and gifts of family**

It's a great time for remembering and celebrating when we think of family. What have been some of the highlights for us working, celebrating or relaxing as a family? What gifts, joys and contributions have our family members given to others that we are proud of and we could celebrate?

Are there specific patterns such as fishing, camping or other holidays that you spent with your children or family? Are there particular events?

Are there differences from when children were small and growing up, overseas holidays, snow, beach, bush, outback or just at home? What about an extended family: any opportunities there: perhaps in the future?

Struggles and triumphs; tragedies and overcoming; special relationships; remarkable achievements; steadfastness; characters; things well done; tasks accomplished?

Heroes or heroines that have gone before or are younger than you; role models who have challenged you; those you have challenged. Who sees you as a role model and why?

*Jot down one highlight each and exchange it with each other. Keep doing this until you run out. Look through the old photos and scrapbooks. Perhaps it is time to put things and memories on to CD or DVD or in a scrapbook or album. Perhaps there is a need to make time to do some of this. Perhaps the Team wants to make a scrapbook of the journey of this study topic.*

### **The next generation**

One of the great joys (or sorrows) for us can be the birth of the first grandchild: it can be almost a vindication of our own existence! Most grandparents are quite deeply affected by this experience. There is something very important about this event and yet it is little acknowledged as such in our current climate. So much of the past is recaptured as we try to develop relationships with these little ones, if we are fortunate

enough and if we want to develop such bonds. Where are we in this and what does this mean for each of us as well as for our Team and for our society?

*Consider your grandchild/children and in a similar way to above; you may like to jot some of the joys and sorrows that they have brought into your lives. Again, if you have no grandchildren, we ask you to consider important people of that generation who have been or are in your life.*

*You may also like to consider other members of your family who have been or are very important to you at this stage. It may be an elderly relative, parents, brothers or sisters, nieces, nephews. Again jot down one or two things about them and their importance to you.*

### **Some readings**

These readings have been selected as ones that may help us to reflect on our lives. You may like to read each of them in turn and then share something of importance to you, taking it in turns. Alternatively just skim them quickly and pick one that speaks most strongly to you and concentrate on sharing about what it means to you. You may of course choose other readings that you think are more appropriate.

#### **1. Genesis 1:26-28**

*“Then God said, “let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he*

*created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it;"*

2. *John 15:8-15*

*"My Father is much glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and you become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you that so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."*

3. *John 2:3-5*

*"Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine". And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants "Do whatever he tells you"*

4. *Mark 9:33-37*

*Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them; whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."*

5. *Luke 15:11-24*

*Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout the country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his*

*father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.”*

### **Questions for consideration and sharing at the meeting**

1. Bring along your favourite photo album and share with your Team, with appropriate explanation, one or two photos that you really like.
2. How you feel about your role as a parent (or mentor) of your children and grandchildren (or young people)?
3. Which of these readings speaks to you most strongly about your role as parent, grandparent, spouse or mentor? Please share how it relates to you in this way?
4. If you happen to be infirm or not well, how do you feel about and cope with the issues raised in the previous questions?
5. How would we like to celebrate both our family life now, and the past memories of our family, to children, siblings, grandchildren and others?

## **Session 2: Our Couple Relationship**

### **Introduction**

This is the second topic in the series on “The Third Age” for Teams. In this topic we would like to examine our relationship with our spouse. In the case of the Spiritual Counsellor or single members: with a significant other in your life at this time, consider them as your spouse. You may wish to think or talk about your spouse even though you may be separated or widowed; or you may see your relationship with the Church as spouse if you wish.

It is a topic that is meant to challenge us to examine our relationships with those we are closest to, the effect that that has had on us, the challenges that remain for us in that or those relationships and how being a member of Teams has helped or hindered us in this. One of the great questions for us is to ask ourselves what it means to love; there is much that goes into building relationships over time and we need to consider how we have built our relationship. Prayerful reflection as a couple is a powerful tool for growth in this journey.

As with the first topic, we suggest that answering the questions as you go through the material, could help you to grow in appreciation of yourself, your spouse and your life. It will also help you to contribute to or lead the discussion at the next meeting of your Team.

### **Our relationships with those close to us**

What about our memories as a couple; the moments of great joy; of significance; of good times of great adventure and excitement? These are all a part of who we are as people, couples, Teams and in our society.

*What about getting out your scrapbook, photo album or diaries about the many things that you have done together; or as a family; or as a team? Jot down the really great memories that you have. They may of course not be the same as those of your spouse.*

*What attracted me to you? What do I think that you really like about me? What are the things that I really like about myself? For singles you may like to talk about a current relationship, your spouse or significant people e.g. "church".*

### **Aging and health**

The most challenging task for us at this stage of our development is the fact that we are all growing older and that with this come the diseases of aging. Illness and disability in ourselves or in our spouse present challenges for us to grow, adapt, cope and accept these changes in ourselves, our partners and in our relationships. Death, separation, divorce and the development of new relationships are events that have occurred for increasing proportions of couples over time; each of these present challenges for us.

There may have been life changing events for you or your spouse with injury or ill health and this may have occurred many years ago or much more recently. Share your responses, feelings and challenges that arose; how did you deal with them?

*How do you feel about growing older? Did you hate having a party for your 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup> or did you enjoy them? Perhaps you might like to jot down some of these feelings and the reasons why.*

*Have there been such life changing events; you may like to share about these?*

## **Maintaining an intimate relationship and loneliness**

Maintaining an intimate, loving relationship becomes an important challenge in the face of declining physical functioning, increasing ill health and disability. The menopause and changing sexual function are clear signs of aging and are challenging for all of us. Intimacy is much more than sexual activity. Touch, physical closeness, awareness and consideration of the other; tenderness, kindness, respect and thoughtfulness all contribute to intimacy in profound ways. Holding hands, anniversaries, birthdays, putting on socks, massaging a sore shoulder or back, helping with other physical limitations become critical exchanges of mutual love and respect. We need to be able to communicate about these physical and emotional needs and if we have not been able to develop the skills to ask for help and support earlier in life then an opportunity is presented to reach a greater level of intimate communication about our needs than ever before.

For those who have lost their spouse or key family, loneliness and going on, on your own is always a challenge. Ongoing grief can be an important issue; if so the session on loss and grief will be an important one for you to share about this. Being close to people remains important for all of us; indeed Teams can become even more important than ever before.

*How is your health? How is that of your spouse? Have you lost your spouse? Is illness or frailty a concern for you? Would you like to jot down some thoughts, feelings or reactions to any of these issues?*

*How is or has the menopause affected your life? How have you been able to maintain intimacy in your life? Do you have difficulty asking for help and battle on regardless? Whilst sexual function lessens and stops for some or even many, being physically close remains important. How do you feel about this?*

## **Hurts and barriers in relationships**

In all relationships there are inevitable hurts and disappointments. It becomes increasingly important if there are barriers that have been there over the years but we have made adjustments and accommodation in our relationships in order to avoid these hurts for these issues to be resolved if that is possible. Forgiveness is a decision rather than a feeling and we all deserve to be free from ongoing resentment that may have been carried for a long time. It may become apparent that there could be a need for true, deep reconciliation – before it is too late.

*What about in your relationship? Are there any “no go” areas? Should you re-examine if the “no go” still applies? Are there things you have wanted to say that have been very difficult for you or your spouse? Is there a need to come to terms with these hurts, apologies or plaudits that you should have acknowledged before? You may wish to write some notes here. Alternatively you may like to consider spending some of your “Sit down” on this area.*

*For singles there may be issues that you have with other family members or the church. Making peace is something that we all deserve and often it is we who hold onto the hurt, when it is only we who have the capacity to decide “to let it go”.*

*You might like to jot some things down and share these.*

## **The joys in your relationship(s)**

As singles or couples we are gifted by those who have or are sharing our lives.

*Perhaps it is important to see what we have, have had and can make the most of. List some of the joys and share these.*

## Some Readings

### 1. Mark 5: 25 – 29; 34

*Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes I will be made well". Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she was healed from her disease.....He said to her, Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

### 2. Kahlil Gibran The Prophet: p81-85 "On Prayer"

*Then a Priestess said, Speak to us of Prayer.*

*And he answered, saying:*

*You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance.*

*For what is prayer but the expansion of yourself into the living ether?*

*And if it is for your comfort to pour your darkness into space, it is also for your delight to pour forth the dawning of your heart.*

*And if you cannot but weep when your soul summons you to prayer, she should spur you again and yet again, though weeping, until you shall come laughing.*

*When you pray you rise to meet in the air those who are praying at that very hour, and whom save in prayer you may not meet.*

*Therefore let your visit to that temple invisible be for naught but ecstasy and sweet communion.*

*For if you should enter the temple for no other purpose than asking you shall not receive:*

*And if you should enter into it to humble yourself you shall not be lifted:*

*Or even if you should enter into it to beg for the good of others you shall not be heard.*

*It is enough that you enter the temple invisible.*

*I cannot teach you how to pray in words.*

*God listens not to your words save when He Himself utters them through your lips.*

*And I cannot teach you the prayer of the seas and the forests and the mountains.*

*But you who are born of the mountains and the forests and the seas can find their prayer in your heart,*

*And if you but listen in the stillness of the night you shall hear them saying in silence:*

*Our God, who art our winged self, it is thy will in us that willeth.*

*"It is thy desire in us that desireth.*

*"It is thy urge in us that would turn our nights, which are thine, into days, which are thine also.*

*"We cannot ask thee for aught, for thou knowest our needs before they are born in us:  
"Thou art our need; and in giving us more of thyself thou givest us all."*

3. *John 8: 7 -10*

*Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman has no one condemned you?"*

4. *Matthew 7: 1 – 5*

*"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement that you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure that you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye"*

5. *Psalms 41: 3*

*"The Lord sustains them on their sickbed; in their illness you heal all their infirmities"*

**Questions for consideration and sharing at the meeting**

1. Consider your health and that of your spouse or those close to you: how do you feel about these issues in your life?
2. List some of the things that you really enjoy doing together. What have been the benefits of changes such as retirement for you? You may like to bring some photos to the meeting.
3. Intimacy is much more than sexual activity: How do you sustain intimacy in your relationship? Are there any things that you would like to do to improve this area of your life together? Singles could think of how closeness to others affects their lives and how this could be enhanced.
4. How does membership of Teams help in sustaining your relationships? What would you like to still contribute to Teams?

### **Session 3: Retirement: a blessing or a curse? (Consider using 2 meetings for this session)**

#### **Introduction**

This is the third session in the study topic “The Third Age.” This month we would like to consider the issues surrounding work, retirement, volunteer activities and the ways in which these roles are changing, have changed or will change for you in the future. There are increasing numbers of people who go to seminars and planning sessions. You may have done so in the past. It might be a good idea to go if you have not been or to revisit the advice and resource materials that you were given but may not have used. There are a lot of quite practical things that are helpful and the Marriage Education Journal Threshold from October 2004 has two articles that are by Kathleen Walters on “Creative retirement for two” and by David de Vaus and Yvonne Wells which report a study on retirement. You should be able to get these from an interlibrary loan. The fact is that about one third of couples experience significant change and problems at times. The Walters article has some quite practical suggestions that you may wish to follow up. One of the important developmental issues for people as they grow older is to have a sense of control of your life in spite of the changes that are going on. We were not meant to be, feel or behave as pieces of flotsam in the river of life. Sometimes people have felt like that for many years and the “Third Age” topic presents an opportunity to develop and take control. Ill health can also lead to such a sense of helplessness and taking control in small ways can be critical in making a difference between hope and despair.

#### **Dreams and challenges**

There was an article in The Readers Digest in about 2001 about “The fifty things I should do before I die.” In it the author demonstrated that not only should we have dreams, but that it is necessary to put your dreams into action if you are going to be serious about taking control of your life and ensuring that those things that are truly important to each of you will actually come to pass. The author made a list of 50 things and each time he crossed one off he added another to the bottom! With retirement, it is important to take stock. A film called “The bucket list” starring Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson was released in 2008 that addresses the same issues. Two men both dying of cancer go and do what they valued before they “kicked the bucket”. You could do this study topic with a bit of a twist by watching the DVD as part of doing the topic as a team or perhaps individually as couples.

What about our dreams about retirement? Have we enacted these dreams, or perhaps we have not shared them with each other openly? Have they been spoiled by ill-health or the needs of others? How do we negotiate about this or should we just give way to our spouse, or do we let the needs of others determine our actions? There are many challenges here.

*Take the opportunity to write down some of your dreams about retirement or from your “Bucket List”! There is usually a priority to the list and the lists of spouses may not be the same. It is important therefore to share these with your spouse. You may also like to relish some of the dreams that you have acted on. Your photos might be good to share!*

### **A time of change**

The challenge for all of us is to take up the opportunities that there are in this new phase of our lives. It varies of course in our personal circumstances as to what it is that is possible. Nevertheless there are many challenges as couples are “thrown together” as it were. The challenges of “personal space” and “couple space”, as well as the allocation of time, need to be responded to. If we are to grow these challenges need to be met. My, your and our time and activities need to be recognised and taken account of respectfully by open negotiation.

*What changes have there been in the way that you share your household tasks? Are you happy with the way things are going or do you think that there need to be some changes? Are there things that you could or would like to do together? You might like to jot some responses down to share with each other and the Team.*

### **Losses and gains**

Living with a decrease in income will bring back concerns for some. Money or the lack of it always evokes strong feelings. There is an increased vulnerability and our sense of security may well be challenged. There is also the opportunity to contribute in ways that you may have wanted to do, possibly for a long time. It is important to discuss these things openly and to take them into account in your decision making.

What about our home? Has it become too large for us? Can we manage it? There are many feelings, memories and much history involved in our home. Leaving and “downsizing” can be fraught with a sense of loss that can at times be quite unexpected.

*Leaving work can leave a strong sense of loss and so can the loss of roles of any sort. The article by de Vaus and Wells shows that there is always a period of adjustment that affects the majority of people. How are we doing in that adjustment or how will we tackle it when the time comes? Perhaps we can jot down how we are feeling about this and share it with each other or the Team.*

## **Some Readings**

These readings have been selected as ones that may help us to reflect on our lives. You may like to read each of them in turn or simply scan them and pick the one that speaks most strongly to you and share this, taking it in turns. You may of course wish to choose other readings that you think are more appropriate.

### *1. Luke 12:22 – 32*

*He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you- you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

### *2. Matthew 5:13 -16*

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.”*

### 3. Matthew 19:20-24

*The young man said to him, “I have kept all these commandments; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow Me.” When the young man heard this, he went away grieving for he had many possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.”*

### 4. Luke 6:43 – 45

*“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.*

### 5. A.A. Serenity Prayer

*“God, grant me the **Serenity** to accept things that I cannot change...  
the **Courage** to change the things I can  
and the **Wisdom** to know the difference.”*

## **Questions for consideration and sharing at the meeting**

1. How are we faring in preparing for, adapting to and settling into retirement? Do we have a list of the things we want to do?
2. How are we/am I coping with changes involved with retirement? What losses have I experienced; what further losses do I anticipate? What have been the gains?
3. What are our dreams for us, for our family, for Teams and for the Church at this time of our changing lives?
4. Are there things that we need to change to allow us to better spend our retirement?
5. What are some of the faith challenges for us at this time? Are there ways in which we can contribute to Teams at this time?

## **Session 4: Personal Growth: “At our age; you must be kidding!”(Consider using 2 meetings for this session)**

### **Introduction**

This is the fourth session in this series of study topics about the “Third Age.” One of the objectives of these topics is to consider what developmental psychologists and geriatricians say about people as they grow older. They speak of positive aging and the fact that many people as they grow older tackle new challenges. The challenges of becoming grandparents, volunteer workers, reducing your golf handicap and doing the things that you have been hoping to do, all have the potential for personal growth. You may like to bring to mind some of the amazing things that older people have achieved (c.f. “In “Naomi’s Guide to Aging Gracefully” (p76) introduction to the study topic p1). Some of the specific issues as people grow older are considered in this topic.

### **Reviewing our origins**

Inevitably we start to review our life as we grow older. Our origins and childhood years come back to us as we see the generations growing up after us. Lots of people become interested in their genealogy and bring the extended family together in this way. Often people get to know things and people that they never thought they would. It’s worth thinking about being involved in putting your origins in context; surprisingly at times there are hurts that have been there and letting go of these regrets is important.

*What are your good and important memories? What are your regrets? Are there things that you need to do?*

### **Reviewing the way we have lived**

The way that we have lived our lives also comes back: the highlights, the losses, the failures and the dreams not met, the joys and the things that you still want to do. Coming to terms with these issues is important so that a level of acceptance and integrity can be maintained. It becomes important to let go of some things and to take pleasure and joy in what has been rather than what has not been. It is difficult for some people to actually name the things that they are proud of because they have a false sense of humility. The challenge for us is to own what we have achieved; remember Christ said: “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

*Do a brainstorm individually of all the things that come to mind that you feel proud of or excited about that you have done in your life. This includes work, sporting and personal achievements. You may also like to describe some of your best qualities.*

*You may also like to list some of the disappointments that you have about your life. Things that you need to let go of; remember- “today is the first day of the rest of your life”: you can travel tomorrow burdened by things that you cannot change and it will spoil tomorrow for you. Alternatively you can decide to let it go because you deserve better. Letting go of hurt, anger, disappointments and bitterness all fall into this category; you simply deserve better than to let tomorrow be spoiled by the past that cannot be changed.*

### **Our lives as a couple (or single/spiritual counsellor)**

As a couple we too need to come to terms with who we are and what we have become as a unit. Are there issues that need to be reconciled and let go? Are there things that have been held as a grudge, an unresolved hurt? These issues can cause much grief and pain and if courageously faced, can lead to a new lease of life and sense of freedom that has been longed for over many years.

What have been your successes? What attracted you first to each other? What do you like about each other now? What photos do you treasure? Bring them along; spend time with your spouse sharing what it is that makes these photos so important to you. (or videos, films etc)

*You may like to focus on the great things you have done as a couple and share these with your spouse and the Team. Bring your favourite photos, movies or CD, DVD of your lives, along to the meeting and share them with the Team.*

### **Our spiritual challenges at this time**

What of our spirituality? Are there challenges here for us? What do we believe about the value of the lives that we have led and what does this mean for our eternity? Prayer, ritual, contemplation and celebration of our lives hold an important place in order to honour the efforts of years that has gone into who we are, what we have done and where our journey is taking us now.

*Are there aspects of your personal spirituality or that of you as a couple that you would like to share? Are there things that you want to work on? Are there things that you and your Team can do to take some of these things further? Perhaps you might like to plan your own retreat this year along these lines.*

### **Handing on the gift of Faith**

What about the handing on of our faith, values and acquired wisdom to those who come behind? Are there disappointments that we need to let go of? Do we need to set others free from our disappointments that stand in the way of a deeper relationship with our spouse or children? We need to value our companionship with one another as individuals, couples and friends? The challenge of reconciliation with ourselves and others confronts us here.

*Are there things that you would like to share with your children or grandchildren but you think that they would not be interested? J R Tolkien wrote to his children each Christmas, which were collected as "The Father Christmas Letters"; why not think of doing something similar?*

*What is it that you want for your children and grandchildren? What are your fears for them?*

### **Our journey in teams**

What about our involvement in Teams? What do we want to tell others about the way that Teams has affected our lives? What challenges are there for us and what can we contribute? What do you value about Teams now? We are “grand parents” to other Teams and Team members; how does that feel?

*What have been some of the highlights in Teams for you? What are your concerns about Teams? What contribution could you and your Team make to the Movement in your Sector?*

*You may like to share these thoughts with each other at your sit down in preparation for the meeting. Other Team members may also appreciate your thoughts for the news letter.*

## Some Readings

These readings have been selected as ones that may help us to reflect on our lives. You may like to read each of them in turn or skim them and pick the one that speaks to you most strongly and then share something of importance to you, taking it in turns. You may of course wish to choose other readings that you think are more appropriate.

### 1. Matthew 25:14-24

*“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave 5 talents, to another he gave 2, to another 1, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the 5 talents went off at once and traded with them, and made 5 more talents. In the same way, the one who had 2 talents made 2 more talents. But the one who had received 1 talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the 5 talents came forward bringing 5 more talents, saying “Master, you handed me over 5 talents; see I have made 5 more talents”. His master said to him, “Well done good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master”.*

### 2. Matthew 18:21-23

*Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord if another member of the church sins against me, how many times should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times”.*

### 3. Mark 10:13-17

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

### 4. Matt 9:35 – 38

*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in all their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.”*

5. Matthew 26:40-42

*Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."*

6. Kahlil Gibran *The Prophet*: p76-77: "On Time"

*And an astronomer said, Master, what of Time?*

*And he answered:*

*You would measure time the measureless and the immeasurable.*

*You would adjust your conduct and even direct the course of your spirit according to hours and seasons.*

*Of time you would make a stream upon whose bank you would sit and watch its flowing.*

*Yet the timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness,*

*And knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream,*

*And that which sings and contemplates in you is still dwelling within the bounds of that first moment which scattered the stars into space.*

*Who among you does not feel that his power to love is boundless ?*

*And yet who does not feel that very love, though boundless, encompassed within the centre*

*Of his being, and moving not from love thought to love thought, nor from love deeds to other love deeds?*

*And is not time even as love is, undivided and spaceless?*

*But if in your thought you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons,*

*And let today embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing.*

**Some questions for consideration at the Team meeting**

1. Are there any areas where you have found a need for reconciliation between you as a couple, with children or other family or even within your Team? If so, how can you plan to resolve this?
2. What are my concerns about our children and grandchildren?
3. If there were one thing that I could change about the way things are and about the future, I would.....
4. What can we do as a Team to enliven our own Team and our Teams community?
5. Are there any things that I/we need to do in response to issues raised in this topic?

## **Session 5: Loss and Grief**

### **Introduction**

Loss is an issue that we cannot escape from throughout our lives. Losses are small and large and as we grow older loss becomes more frequent and often become more severe. Dealing with loss is probably the most important challenge for us in the “Third Age” because loss and grief are those things that cause us to be fearful and less than who we can be. This topic is not an easy one because we are confronted with the pain that results; as such it is the focus for this topic.

Central to loss is the pain that we experience because something or someone has been taken from us. It may be obvious things such as the loss of a spouse or child but often it can be less obvious such as lost opportunities, betrayal by someone or an institution you trusted, symbolic loss of position, role or status; or deep personal loss such as a loss of faith or a sense of personal failure. For most of us the common losses of health, children leaving and the tyranny of work related mobility, work and home as we downsize, lead us to be familiar with loss: but have we dealt with the grief that is involved?

Grief progresses in stages: denial, bargaining, anger, despair and resolution according to Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and it can get stuck anywhere along the process to leave us with the burden of inhibited, distorted or prolonged grief. Loss and grief may trigger depression or lead to poor coping by drinking to excess, getting too busy to grieve or rushing into new commitments or relationships creating considerable complexity which can come back with full force at a further episode of loss.

Grief that happens to a couple such as when a child dies is complex. There are a number of things that should be remembered: two people do not necessarily grieve at the same rate nor in the same way; nor do the stages of their grief necessarily concur; people who are grieving find it difficult to listen to each other because they are preoccupied by their own grief; people may regress when grieving and grief from other times that has been internalised emerge at that time. The different stages of grief recur and each person’s way of grieving needs to be understood and the pain acknowledged. Whilst it is difficult to support each other at such times, the sharing of grief is important so that greater intimacy and understanding may result.

Society and circumstances have not always been encouraging of children or people in general to grieve in an open and healthy way. People who have experienced deprivation and loss including torture etc in situations of war or violence or in domestic violence as children or the effects of childhood sexual abuse, often store the grief away inside because they did not have the opportunity to grieve, as survival was the name of the game at that time for them. So all of us come to “The Third Age” with our own histories of losses and grief which will affect how we cope with further loss.

## **Loss of roles, home and work**

In previous sessions we have named these losses and no doubt our feelings were stirred remembering these events. It is important to go back and see if we were able to name and discuss these painful events with our spouse when “sitting down”. Sometimes this is not easy and people side step the issue. If you are aware that this may have happened, perhaps it could help to name the loss and the discomfort by acknowledging that you think the issue may have been side-stepped.

What was the loss? Perhaps you could name it and jot some notes about the circumstances at the time; try to describe the feelings and do not be surprised if tears seem to be not far away. If so it is good to let these feelings be and share them, possibly for the first time. Sometimes when thinking about the loss, the feeling of anger or irritation results, particularly when you may have been betrayed and disillusioned. Again that resentment needs to be named and listened to.

*Was your loss that of the home or the children who you have to love at a distance? Do you miss your work and the positions you held; were there opportunities denied; failure to recognise your contributions; theft of your work by others? Name what it was and describe your feelings. Remember that as you listen to each other it is not your fault that your spouse is grieving with anger or sadness. It is simply the way that grief is. Listening is what is important. Jot down your thoughts and feelings.*

## **Loss of Health, Frailty and Deteriorating Function**

With the loss of health comes the fear of death, helplessness and dependence upon others. When you are on your own, without support this can terrify and immobilise people. There is the fear of pain too. All of us have a different set of experiences in dealing with ill health. Some of us have lived with ill health for years; some have had a catastrophic illness episode and some are aware of a gradual decline in fitness and “seniors’ moments”. With that come the fantasies of the future about strokes, cancer and Alzheimers. These thoughts are normal for all of us and sharing them can help us to celebrate what we have, live for the now and to have confidence in the future.

*How are you feeling about your own health at this time? What are some of your fears about the future? Have there been experiences in your life of relatives or parents and their dying that cause you to fear the future? Jot these down, consider them and share the way you feel with your spouse.*

*Spiritual counsellors and singles may wish to focus especially upon the fear of being alone and having to rely upon others; or having no one to care.*

## **Loss of Spouse or Child**

The death of a child, infertility, stillbirths, termination of pregnancy or even miscarriages may bring forth great grief and feelings of devastation. Grief about the choice to have no one to follow you in the next generation may also strike unexpectedly. Troubled feelings of loss combined with guilt, shame or resentment or betrayal can be particularly burdensome. Anger and guilt can be common, especially anger with God.

The loss of a spouse too can be through illness or separation and divorce. In the latter case there is often that profound sense of betrayal with considerable bitterness, especially when the spouse went his or her own way leaving the childrearing and financial burden to you.

For some who may have been widowed at a younger age and have remarried, that loss may also return. The death of one's companion in life for many years may leave this great hole of loneliness and emptiness that rises up in the throat or chest. It is common to feel lost and it can come upon you in waves when you least expect it.

You may simply be thinking about how you will respond when this will happen to you when you see this happen to friends and you attend their funerals.

All these feelings are good to name, express and share, in order to let go of them so that we are free to live in peace. The "whys", "what ifs"; "I or we should have" all come back at these times; they need to be acknowledged but let go because they are past and cannot be changed; acceptance, forgiveness of self and others, reconciliation with spouse

and or God may be needed for peace to enter our hearts again. Essentially we have to make the decision to let these feelings go; be it in offering, in reconciliation or in acceptance.

*We suggest that you may like to jot down your thoughts. Name the loss that you feel most strongly about and whatever feelings accompany it. Sometimes people are really angry with God for allowing these awful things to have happened to you. It is important too to name these feelings. Share them in the sit down.*

### **Anticipatory Grief**

This was touched on a little above. The “Third Age” can be ruined if we allow the fear of the losses that will occur in the future to paralyse us in the present. People can become risk averse and instead of being free to enjoy their retirement they play safe and stultify hopes, dreams, wishes, wants and just simple enjoyment and contentment day by day.

Anticipating the loss of your spouse can also evoke quite profound feelings of gratitude for the life that you have shared and sharing these deep feelings can lead to growth of intimacy in your relationship. It is the sort of thing that doing these study topics can lead to: a deep appreciation of the companions, lovers and friends that you have been for one another; a genuine appreciation of all that has gone before to build what you have, without superficial romantic superlatives.

*Describe your fears of the future; describe your gratitude for what has been or what is. This too is a topic in its own right.*

*All forms of loss can be considered including those of Singles and Spiritual Counsellors; their losses and how they have overcome them and have gone on. For Spiritual Counsellors; the choice of the celibate life for the sake of Christ has inherent losses. If grief is still raw perhaps sharing this with the Team should be considered.*

### **Some readings**

1. *Kahlil Gibran: The Prophet p40-41; "On Joy and Sorrow"*

*THEN a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.*

*And he answered:*

*Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.*

*And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.*

*And how else can it be?*

*The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.*

*Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?*

*And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives?*

*When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.*

*When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.*

*Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."*

*But I say unto you, they are inseparable.*

*Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed. |*

*Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.*

*Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.*

*When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.*

2. John 11:21-27

*Martha said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him". Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again". Martha said to him: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

3. Kahlil Gibran *The Prophet*: p65-67 " On Pain"

*And a woman spoke, saying, Tell us of Pain. And he said:  
Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.  
Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.  
And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles in your life, your pain would seem less wondrous than your joy;  
And would you accept the seasons of the heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.  
And you would watch with serenity through the winters of your grief.*

*Much of your pain is self chosen.  
It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.  
Therefore trust the physician, and drink his remedy in silence and tranquillity:  
For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided by the tender hand of the Unseen.  
And the cup he brings, though it burn your lips, has been fashioned of the clay which the potter has moistened with His own sacred tears.*

4. Luke 22:39-45

*He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When they reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial". Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."*

**Some questions to consider for sharing at the Team meeting**

1. Are there any issues or losses that have come to mind in a raw sort of way? Consider sharing the loss, the ongoing anger or grief with the Team.
2. Do you feel angry or cheated by God? If so it would be good to share your feelings and the reasons for this with the Team.
3. Would you like to share the peace to which you have come after your loss? Please share with the Team the good times and your vision of the future?
4. How do you feel about the future? Do you have fears or do your hopes balance these out?

## **Session 6: Facing Our Mortality (Consider using 2 meetings for this session)**

### **Introduction**

Talking about the end of our lives is never an easy thing to do. All of us think about this as we grow older. Our thoughts and fears can cause us to become excessively focussed on the negatives. In this topic we would like to explore with you how we are preparing to meet with our God when we die, and die we must. It is a taboo subject for many couples yet all of us have thoughts about this especially when illness strikes or when this affects friends, neighbours or family.

Many couples spend important time discussing these issues with each other. They make their wills and consider their wishes for their children, the church or charities. They spend time thinking about what they would want done if they were catastrophically ill: would they want to be resuscitated? Medical power of attorney, power of attorney and other issues affecting economic issues such as prepaid and prepared funeral arrangements are all valid and important discussions. Sometimes these are put off until it is too late. A useful website is that of Catholic Health Australia that can assist here. (<http://www.cha.org.au>).

As we grow older our concepts of the life hereafter also change. How does the unknown quality of death leave us feeling? What of our prayer life in the face of death: the thoughts of Kahlil Gibran may challenge us.

This sixth topic is not meant to be morbid. The fact is that many people feel very afraid of dying and that fear often spoils their lives. We can feel extremely vulnerable when we have been left behind or have had a life threatening illness. Talking about it can help us to put it into perspective. There are a number of areas that we could consider:

### **Our beliefs about the hereafter**

What do we believe about life after death? How does what the scriptures say about the Resurrection affect me now? How have my and our ideas about heaven and the hereafter changed over our lifetime?

*Do we feel cheated; have we lost any sense of what we used to believe? Things have changed a lot in the Church. Where is it all going? Can we speak about this with one another or perhaps more easily within our Team? You might like to jot things down to share at your sit down.*

*What do you think Heaven will be like? If we are to meet our forebears, who would you most like to see? Share this with your spouse.*

**What would Jesus say?**

What would Jesus say to me and to us if he came for dinner one evening this week about the way that I and we have lived our lives?

*What do we think about when considering those who have gone before us? What do we think of when we are thinking about those we will leave behind?*

*Sometimes there are children who depend on us and have been disabled, or are having a tough time (even though it may be of their own making). Who will care for them now? How can we provide for their independence or their care?*

*If their future care is beyond our financial capacity where can we obtain knowledge of community organisations or governmental services which exist to assist them and us?*

**What do I or we, have to do before we go?**

Letting go of life is clearly difficult but necessary as we grow older. Meeting our Creator and preparing for this is a challenge. It is not at all unusual for people to feel angry about all they still have to do when ill health or old age catches up with them; “Cut down before my time!”

*What are some of your unfulfilled dreams?*

*What are your fears for the children and grandchildren; what do you still hope and dream for? Do you ever voice these concerns? Perhaps now is an opportunity to do so.*

## Some Readings

These readings have been selected as ones that may help us to reflect on our lives. You may like to read each of them in turn or skim them and pick the one that speaks to you most strongly and then share something of importance to you, taking it in turns. You may of course wish to choose other readings that you think are more appropriate.

### 1. *John 11:38-44*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man said to him, "Lord already there is a stench because he has been dead for 4 days". Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed that you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

### 2. *Mark 5:38-43*

*When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but is sleeping" And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her "little girl get up" And immediately she got up and began to walk about (she was 12 years of age).*

### 3. *John 20:24-26*

*But Thomas one of the 12 was not with them when Jesus came. When they told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

### 4. *John 20:26-30*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood amongst them and said, Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My lord and my God." Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

5. *Matthew 25:14-24*

*“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave 5 talents, to another he gave 2, to another 1, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the 5 talents went off at once and traded with them, and made 5 more talents. In the same way, the one who had 2 talents made 2 more talents. But the one who had received 1 talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the 5 talents came forward bringing 5 more talents, saying “Master, you handed me over 5 talents; see I have made 5 more talents”. His master said to him, “Well done good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master”.*

6. *Kahlil Gibran The Prophet: p95-98 “On Death”*

*“Then Almitra spoke, saying, We would ask you now of Death.*

*And he said:*

*You would know the secret of death. But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?*

*The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.*

*If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.*

*For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one*

*In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;*

*And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.*

*Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.*

*Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour.*

*“Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king?”*

*Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?*

*For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?*

*And what it is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?*

*Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.*

*And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.*

*And when the earth shall claim your limbs then you shall truly dance.”*

7. *Paul’s letter to Timothy 2:4; 7-8*

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous*

*judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

**Some questions to consider for sharing at the Team meeting**

1. How do I think about Heaven now? What about those who have gone before me? What would I like to say to them?
2. What is it about dying that worries me the most?
3. When I think about dying and saying goodbye for the last time what or who am I going to miss the most? What are those things that I still want to do?
4. What do I want to leave to posterity? How would I like to be remembered?
5. Are there things I/we want to do to respond to the things that have been raised in this study topic?

## **Session 7: The celebration of my Life (Or our lives)**

### **Introduction**

This is the final topic of this challenging set of study topics that addresses the developmental issues for us in “The Third Age.” This one is meant to be a true celebration of the great lives that you have lived and are living. It may seem a little strange, even macabre to be asked to consider your own, your spouse’s or your friend’s funerals. Undoubtedly this topic will bring back memories of loved ones that you have lost. Some people may feel quite sad, especially if you have recently lost someone you love. The aim of this topic though is to do the opposite to focussing on the grief, we ask you to focus on the gift that each of these people has been to us and to celebrate not only their lives but most especially your own lives.

In our culture it is not usual for people to say good things about themselves. There is a strong cultural sanction against self adulation. This session asks us to own those good things that we have achieved and asks us to name for others: our spouse, our Team members our friends, what it is that they truly admire. In reflecting upon lives well lived, it is also important to own the highlights. It is not meant to make any sort of display about them just simply an acknowledgement in the presence of friends. Life cannot be celebrated if the struggles that there have been are not known. There are many heroic points in most people’s lives where they truly have known what it means “To give of substance, rather than from excess”.

The ritual around the end of life highlights the greatness of the person and this session asks us to acknowledge in one another some of those great qualities- whilst we can. Whilst it is true that the ritual is more for the benefit for those left behind, it seems a terrible pity that so often, many of the things said about people after they have gone could have been said in affirmation whilst they were alive.

*How would you like to be remembered? What would you like to be said about you in the eulogy at your funeral, or what words would you like on your tombstone? Who would you want to speak about you if it were possible? Why?*

*What would you put on the tombstone or say about your spouse or friends if you could, to do them justice and to honour their lives and efforts?*

*What sort of ritual would you like to celebrate your life? How would you like to celebrate your spouse's life or those of your friends?*

*What have been the highlights for you in your involvement in Teams? You may like to share this with your spouse and your friends.*

*Perhaps you would like to plan your goodbye to your friends? Jot some thoughts down; you may like to complete it after the study topic.*

*Some things I must do before I die". Do you have a list like this? If not you should make one. What about celebrating your lives whilst you can still participate in it!*

**What would Jesus say if he was giving the homily at your requiem mass?**

“Jesus had no medals or citations and faced death as a failure in the eyes of the world. Earlier he had corrected his disciples’ wish to be seen to be successful, urging an acceptance of challenge as a divine gift. It would be more appropriate for us to present a belief in dignity and deep faith in God’s love for us and to communicate our role in the completion of His goal for us. We cannot correct the past. That is now irrelevant since the worst sinner can still repent past sorrows. Better to receive God’s forgiveness and be at peace. Rather than reflect on worldly goals it might be more relevant to target what we might have said at Jesus’ funeral”; (Comments from one Team on this question).

*So what is it that you as a person; or you as a couple or you as a Team; or we as Movement; or we as a Church are being called to do in response to this study topic. You may wish to pray about it as individuals, couples or as a Team. Perhaps you may wish to consider a special Team meeting around a Eucharist to respond and offer the gift of your lives at that Eucharist. You may wish to share what you have experienced with others.*

## Some Readings

These readings have been selected as ones that may help us to reflect on our lives. You may like to read each of them in turn or skim them and pick the one that speaks to you most strongly and then share something of importance to you, taking it in turns. You may of course wish to choose other readings that you think are more appropriate.

### 1. John 21:9-15

*When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" Because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

### 2. John 11:21-28

*"Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me, will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one coming into the world."*

### 3. Luke 23:39-43

*One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

4. *John 10:10*

*“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.”*

5. *Luke 10:36-37*

*“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “Go and do likewise.”*

6. *Matthew 25:21*

*“His Master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Master.’”*

**Some questions to consider for sharing at the Team meeting**

1. Bring with you some acknowledgement that you have received for some personally important reason. Tell us about it and how you feel telling the Team this.
2. Do you have an important story to tell about your life; something that tells about your faith? What qualities would your friends recognise in you? What will people miss about you when you are gone?
3. What would you like to write on your tombstone if you could?
4. Which songs you would like sung at your requiem and why?
5. What would your spouse, your best friend or children say about you at your wake? What about workmates? What would Jesus say?
6. Are there things that you want to do or need to do to take charge of this stage of your life?

## **Session 8: Celebration of our Team**

It was suggested that at the completion of this challenging study topic that the Team may wish to “Celebrate life” as a group. There could be many ways in which we may like to celebrate in an authentic way. We could make it part of our next Team meeting; if so it could be the study topic component of the Team meeting. We suggest that it could be considered to have 2 components: a liturgical celebration of thanksgiving for life and the life of this particular Team and perhaps a social celebration that is culturally appropriate.

Alternatively it could be part of the annual review meeting for your Team where you may wish to consider your responses and let the experience influence the way that your Team has changed so that you can truly celebrate life in the Third Age. Alternatively you may simply wish to celebrate socially with a Mad-hatters “unbirthday party” or dinner.

It is suggested that this could be planned in response to the following questions:

1. What are the things that I/we have gained from this study topic?
2. What do I/we think that our Team has gained from this study topic?
3. What sort of response would I/we like to make in prayer for the great gift of life that has been given to us?
4. What sort of response would I/we like to make socially to celebrate our lives and the life of this Team?
5. How will what we have learned be incorporated into our Team life over the next twelve months?

