

# PART I



## ORIENTATION

Someone who is going to consider taking part in a ministry to the elderly needs to know what is required. You must come to grips with the needs. You must discern what the word of God directs you to do. You must assess your own gifts and recognize your strengths and weaknesses. And, above all, you must develop a genuine concern for the welfare of those to whom you would minister.

Part I has been put together to help you orient yourself to the tasks and challenges of a nursing home ministry. Read and ponder the sections you find here before you begin to wrestle with the “how to” portions in the subsequent parts of the manual.



# PLEASE RESPOND

*by Calvin Freeman, Geneva College*

Anyone who visits nursing homes has stories to tell, and I am no exception. The stories point to the tremendous need.

Mr. Joseph Dean was a lonely man. He was living at the Geriatric Center and there were few people there with whom he could communicate. He was deeply interested in spiritual things; he liked to talk about the Bible and problems related to it. Mr. Dean had no living relatives that I know of, and only occasionally did any friend have time to visit him—so he was very much alone. Mr. Dean longed for release from the pain and anguish of his world.

“I was disappointed when I woke up this morning,” he told me one day.

“Why?” I asked.

“I prayed last night that when I awoke this morning I would be in heaven. Instead, when I opened my eyes I found I was still here!”

Mr. Dean’s experience was not all that unusual. The number of happy people in a nursing home often is quite small.

It is difficult for someone to lose not only his friends, but also his independence. Mr. Dean was confined to bed and was totally dependent upon the nursing assistants who might not be able to come when he needed them. There were times when he sat for hours on a bed pan waiting for the nurses to come.

I remember well one lady with Parkinson’s disease who was unable to keep her hands from jerking and who, though she enjoyed reading, was finding it more and more impossible. This lady, who gave no evidence of being a Christian, would ask, “Why me? Why is this happening to me?” I remember another elderly lady from a Christian Science background who was in great pain as she lay dying with cancer. I remember telling her of the nature of Christ—that He was not just man but both God and man. “To think,” she repeated over and over again, “I have been wrong all these years.” She thanked me for telling her and at that time gave evidence of committing herself to Christ, the eternal Son of God.

Another lady, who had been a nurse and had spent her life sacrificing and giving to others, told me that she had always expected that when she became old there would be someone to do the same thing for her that she had done for others. It was a big disappointment for her to learn that her own life of giving was not a guarantee that she would be remembered when she was old. Her own daughter, married to a millionaire, did not have time to bring her postage stamps.

These examples point to some of the many needs that exist among the aged. But it is not enough merely to become aware of the needs. We must also become aware of our obligation as Christians. I think of the passage in James which tells us that faith without works is dead. The Christian simply cannot face needs without at the same time becoming aware of the obligation.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. James 2:15-17 (KJV)

I think also of that well-known passage from St. Paul's letter written to the church at Philippi. God's people are called upon to have in them the same mind which was in Christ Jesus. We are not to be preoccupied with ourselves but rather we should be deeply concerned about the needs of others, even as Christ was willing to forget His own rights to the privileges of heaven and in obedience to His Father humiliate Himself on this earth, making Himself of no reputation and becoming obedient unto death, even the death on the cross (see Phil. 2:4ff.). These two passages point to the obligation that is placed upon all Christians to forget themselves and to follow their Lord by showing mercy and love for those who are in need. This lifestyle of service after the manner of Christ is filled with countless blessings and innumerable rewards. Please respond.



# HONOR

Wherever we turn in the Bible, we consistently see exhortations to honor the aged. In the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17) we find the well-known commandments to honor father and mother, whatever their age. Other commandments prohibit afflicting or taking advantage of the widow (for example, Ex. 22:22). Leviticus 19:32 also makes our attitude to the elderly abundantly clear: “You shall rise up before the gray-headed, and honor the aged...” The New Testament likewise promotes an attitude of honor as it reiterates the command to honor parents in particular (Matt. 15:1-9; Eph. 6:2, 3) and the elderly in general (1 Tim. 5:1-3).

The scriptural examples of honor and dishonor give us a clearer idea of exactly what honor is. In relation to honoring God through sacrifice and through His Son (Mal. 1:6-14; 1 Sam. 2:27-30; John 5:22, 23) we see that to honor is to esteem, revere, regard, respect, give recognition to, or recognize the value, importance, or significance of someone. Some antonyms and divergent concepts are to despise, reject, mock, show contempt for, be ashamed of, or speak evil of someone (Is. 53:3; Ps. 22:6, 7; Deut. 28:49, 50; Prov. 30:17).

Honor is an attitude of the heart which issues in action. In Matthew 15:1-9 Christ condemns the attitude of the Pharisee who says that he has pledged his belongings to God so he doesn't have to give them to his needy parents. Christ describes this action as putting the traditions of men (pledging to God) before the commandment of God (honoring parents).

Assuming that we do have a heart attitude of honor, how can we make it complete by showing honor through our actions? The Bible has some helpful suggestions. In the Old Testament we see God's care for the widow as He protects her (Ps. 68:5—physical, psychological needs), provides for her (Deut. 14:28, 29—material needs), includes her in feasts (Deut. 16:10-15—social, cultural, spiritual needs), shows special compassion on her (Ex. 22:22; cf. Is. 9:17—emotional needs), and executes justice for her (Deut. 10:18—legal needs). In the New Testament, honor involves taking care of, giving priority to (Matt. 15:1-9; Rom. 12:10-21). First Timothy 5:1-8, 16 tells us how to provide for the needs of widows. John 19:25-27 shows us—as a model—Jesus' care of his mother.

With these examples in mind it is not hard to see many ways in which we can honor the elderly in nursing homes. Good manners such as rising when they enter, not calling them by their first names until they ask us to do so, knocking on their doors before entering, asking permission to enter or sit down—these are obvious ways to show honor. In addition, we can honor them by listening well—to their sorrows, their reminiscences, even their complaints.

*Note:* Part III of this manual (“Visitation”) gives many helpful and workable suggestions that can be implemented as you visit elderly folk in your own local nursing homes.

When honoring the elderly seems especially difficult, remember that in God's view of things the greatest honor is given to what is often considered the least honorable (1 Cor. 12:12-26). It is a privilege and a blessing to stand firm against the ways the world views things and to see with the eyes of God as we honor the elderly.

# MINISTRY TO THE ELDERLY: AN OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY

This outline should help you discover, if you don't already know, what Scripture has to say concerning the elderly, their role in the family of God and the responsibility the church has to minister to them.

The purpose of the outline is to get you in touch with the relevant passages of Scripture. The next stage depends on you. Plan to spend some time in the passages that are listed below. Get yourself a notebook to record your reflections and insights as you study.

Don't try to work through the whole outline in one sitting. There is too much there. Instead, work through only a portion of the outline at one sitting, in keeping with a plan and schedule that will take you through the whole within a week or so.

Tag these passages in your Bible. You will find yourself wanting to share many of them with people you will be meeting in your ministry.

## I. A biblical view of the elderly and aging

### A. Old age can be a privilege.

#### 1. Old age is a blessing.

##### a. It is a sign of the blessing of the Messianic Age.

(1) Is. 65:20 (see vss. 17-25). With reference to the new heavens and the new earth long life is assured.

(2) Zech. 8:3-5; Jer. 31:13. When Jerusalem is restored, the old will be there.

##### b. It is a reward for piety.

(1) Deut. 30:19, 20. Loving obedience to God is rewarded with long life.

(2) Ex. 20:12. Honor to father and mother results in long life.

(3) Job 42:16, 17. Job's perseverance was rewarded with long life.

(4) For further study, Ps. 91:14-16; Eph. 6:1-3.

##### c. It is a token of divine favor.

(1) Gen. 15:13-15. Abraham is assured of God's blessing of old age.

(2) Ps. 128:5, 6. To live to see one's grandchildren is a blessing of God.

(3) 1 Sam. 2:31, 32. Lack of age implies a curse.

##### d. Old age, however, is not always a blessing.

(1) Deut. 28:50. God curses those who do not obey Him; this curse bears on the elderly.

(2) Is. 3:5; 9:14, 15; Jer. 51:22b. God is no respecter of persons in His chastisement and punishment. The details of these curses are of interest.

#### 2. Old age is honored and respected.

##### a. Honor of old age in the Old Testament.

(1) Lev. 19:32. "You shall rise up before the gray-headed, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord." Our attitude of honor manifests itself in behavior.

(2) For further study, see Job 29:8; Wisd. of Sol. 2:10; Eccles. 8:6.

- b. Honor of old age in the New Testament.
    - (1) 1 Tim. 5:1, 2. The old are to be treated with the same honor due to our parents.
    - (2) 1 Pet. 5:5. The younger are to be subject to the elder.
    - (3) For further study on the honor due parents, see Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1-3; Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:6-12.
  - c. The honor of the old is recognized as a new kind of beauty (cf. Prov. 20:29; 16:31).
3. God's covenant promises are given to the elderly.
- a. Is. 46:3, 4. God's faithfulness is constant, being manifested as compassionate care to His elderly saints.
  - b. Ps. 71. Here a righteous man prays to God in his old age, praising Him for His righteousness and faithfulness (vss. 19, 22-24), and calling upon God in his time of need. The whole psalm deserves careful attention.
  - c. Ps. 103:5. God renews the youth of His people (cf. Is. 40:28-31).
  - d. John 3:4-8. God can give new life even to the elderly.
  - e. Ps. 92:14, 15. God promises fruitfulness to the elderly.
  - f. Ps. 146:5-9; 147:3, 6; Jas. 1:27. Widows are a privileged class for God's care and provide a model for our care of the elderly.
    - (1) Ps. 68:5. God protects the widow.
    - (2) Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Is. 47:6. God executes justice for the widow and curses those who pervert justice for the widow.
    - (3) Deut. 14:29; 26:12, 13; 24:19-21; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 5:1-16; John 19:26, 27. God provides for the financial and material needs of the widows.
    - (4) Deut. 16:10, 11, 13, 14; Zech. 8:3, 4. God makes special provisions to include the widow in the covenant life of His people. Here they are to rejoice at the feasts of God *with* His people. This may well indeed have implications for the presence of the elderly at the Lord's Supper, the New Testament feast of God.
    - (5) Is. 9-17. God's special attitude toward the widow is compassion.
    - (6) 1 Tim. 5:1-16. Further New Testament applications are detailed here.
    - (7) Luke 7:11-17. Jesus has compassion on the widow of Nain, exercising His redemptive power on her behalf.

B. Old age can be a time of special trial.

- 1. Old age can be a time of fear and anxiety.
  - a. Ps. 71:9-13ff. The vulnerability and weakness of old age is a special concern even for the righteous.
  - b. Eccles. 12:1-7. This is often read as a classic description of the infirmities of old age. The Good News Bible provides an especially helpful translation.
- 2. Old age can be a time of failing health.
  - a. Eccles. 12:1-7. This description is worth a rereading.
  - b. Gen. 27:1; 48:10; 1 Sam. 4:15; 2 Sam. 19:35; 1 Kings 14:4. The eyesight and senses of the elderly often fail. (For a positive benefit of this, see 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:7)
  - c. 2 Cor. 4:16-5:10; 1 King 15:23. Age brings decay to the outer man.

3. Old age does not always diminish strength.
  - a. Deut. 34:7. Moses was strong and healthy at 120 years of age.
  - b. Josh. 14:10-12. Caleb also remained strong into his eighty-fifth year and was ready for further adventures.

## II. The opportunities and responsibilities of the elderly

### A. God's expectations of elderly Christians.

1. Old age provides opportunities.
  - a. Ps. 71:18; 48:13. Old age provides an opportunity to show God's faithfulness.
  - b. Ps. 90:12; Heb. 5:14. Old age provides an opportunity to become wise.
  - c. Lev. 19:32; Rev. 1:14 (Dan. 7:13). Old age provides an opportunity to "picture" God, the Ancient of Days.
  - d. Matt. 24:13. Old age provides an opportunity to persevere.
2. The elderly can be a benefit to others.
  - a. Job 12:12; 1 Kings 12:6 ff. The wisdom gained through long life can benefit others.
  - b. Ps. 37:25. The experience of the elderly can provide spiritual encouragement.
  - c. Ezra 3:10-12. The elderly can be a source of tradition, order, "roots."
3. Elderly saints are presented to us in Scripture in several ways.
  - a. Ps. 92:12-15. Here the righteous elderly are pictured as a flourishing tree.
    - (1) Vs. 12. The elderly are to flourish and grow in faith (cf. Ps. 1:1-3; Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:1).
    - (2) Vs. 13. The elderly are to be in the house of the Lord (cf. Eph. 2:19ff.; I Pet. 2:4-10, esp. vs. 5; Heb. 3:6).
    - (3) Vs. 14. The elderly are to bear fruit (cf. John 15; Gal. 5:22, 23; Matt. 5-7; Eph. 4-6; 2 Cor. 4, 5). Inner character development is always a responsibility and opportunity for the Christian.
    - (4) Vs. 15. The elderly are to display and proclaim the Lord's uprightness, steadfastness (cf. Ps. 71:15, 24; 37:25; Phil. 1:19-26).
  - b. Luke 2:25-38. Simeon and Anna are two New Testament illustrations of Ps. 92:12-15. Notice as many specific correlations as possible between these two saints and the picture in Ps. 92.
  - c. 1 Tim. 5:5, 6. Here the "real widow" gives us a picture of what is expected of the elderly Christian woman. These then are expectations and responsibilities that may be held up to both young and old as goals (see vss. 9, 10 for the bearing of these goals on the "pre-widows").
  - d. Titus 2:2-5, 11-15. Paul gives specific commands to the old men and the old women. Notice the authority with which these instructions are commended in verse 12.
  - e. Eccles. 11:8; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Zech. 8:4 may be consulted for further study.

B. Responsibilities of the non-Christian elderly.

1. Everyone is under obligation to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and his neighbor as himself.
2. “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) and are called to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
3. All men, then, must submit to the lordship of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:10).

**III. The church’s responsibility toward the elderly**

A. The church’s responsibility to the elderly begins with Christians (Gal. 6:10).

1. Lev. 19:32; 1 Tim. 5:1, 2 (see I, A, 2 above). The church must honor the elderly.
2. Jas. 1:27; Matt. 25:36. The church must visit the elderly.
3. Ps. 71:9, 18. The church must not forsake or cast off the elderly.
  - a. Deut. 16:11, 14. The elderly, especially the widows, are to be included in the community life of the church. Do not accept the pattern of isolation of the elderly so often imposed by the world around us.
  - b. 2 Sam. 19:31-40. The desire of the elderly to stay at home should be honored.
  - c. 1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16. The family has a special role to play in the care of the elderly. The church has a responsibility to teach families to be obedient to God’s word at this point.
  - d. 1 Tim. 5:3, 9ff.; Deut. 14:29. The church is called upon to provide for certain widows.
4. Ps. 68:5; Deut. 10:18; Ex. 22:21-24; Jer. 7:6. Even as God executes justice and protects widows, the church as the body of Christ surely must be like God in this concern.
5. The church’s responsibility to the elderly includes preparation for old age—and that starts early—and the prevention of future difficulties.
  - a. Ps. 71:6; John 15:1-11. The elderly need to be taught to trust God. This starts from childhood.
  - b. 2 Tim. 1:5; Gen. 17:7; Ruth 4:14-17; John 19:26, 27. Covenantal families must be developed.
  - c. 1 Tim. 5:10-16; Titus 2:2-5, 11-15. The elderly must learn what is expected of them.
  - d. Titus 2:3-5. Opportunities for the elderly to instruct the younger are vital.
  - e. Gal. 6:7ff. The aging process needs to be understood: there are physical, mental and spiritual consequences of our manner of living.
  - f. Ps. 1:2. Here development of a life of prayer and meditation is encouraged.

B. The church also has a responsibility to non-Christians.

1. Gal. 6:10. We are to do good to all men as we have the opportunity.
2. Matt. 28:19, 20. We have been commissioned by our Lord to make disciples of all nations. Certainly we are not to overlook the elderly in our desire to proclaim the gospel of eternal life to all men. The love of God is to be expressed in word and deed.

#### **IV. Ministering to the elderly**

- A. The motives for working with the elderly.
  - 1. 1 Cor. 10:3. To bring glory to God.
  - 2. 2 Cor. 1:3-7. To worship and thank God.
  - 3. Gal. 5:6. To show our faith.
  - 4. Matt. 7:24-27; Matt. 25:31-46; Jas. 1:22-25; 1 Tim. 5:1-6. To obey God's commands.
  - 5. 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12; Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15, 16. To build up the church.
- B. The privilege of working with the elderly.
  - 1. Matt. 25:40; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18. To be with Christ in His work, becoming more and more like Jesus.
  - 2. Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Jas. 1:25. To know more of God's love, mercy and compassion through Christ in us ministering to others.
  - 3. 2 Cor. 4:18. To be involved in the temporal sickness and suffering that so often point up the eternal realities: life, death and judgment.
  - 4. Is. 65; Zech. 8:4, 5; Rev. 21, 22.
- C. Suggestions for working with the elderly.
  - 1. Show deep care for their needs—physical (encourage the staff, pray for needs); emotional (visit, listen, pray); and spiritual (conduct worship services, read Scripture, pray).
  - 2. Encourage the development of talents and abilities of the elderly.
  - 3. Encourage friends outside the nursing home to join you in your efforts.
  - 4. Be sensitive to family and community relations that the elderly have. Encourage these others to become more involved.
  - 5. Give small gifts or cards on birthdays and/or Christmas, etc.
  - 6. Share the greatest gift of all—salvation through Jesus Christ.

As you look through the rest of this manual, you will read more about many of these suggestions, about how to make these goals more concrete. Don't be overwhelmed by the number of suggestions. Start with one area where you think God is calling you to work—and move on from there. We have made relatively few suggestions, really. We trust God will bring others to your mind, so that the ministry to the elderly may be as varied and rich as possible.

# QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING A SERVANT OF CHRIST

Our Father has good works prepared for each of us to do, works that delight Him, bring us joy and satisfaction, and bless others with a more personal knowledge of His love and mercy. Even more than His servants, we are His children, sons and daughters of God, whom He invites to join Him in serving the residents, and so bringing Him glory. Although He has created each of us as a distinct individual, there are certain qualities that we should have or be striving for if we are to minister to others. Reflect on the following Scripture passages and assess your qualifications for service to Christ.

*For God so loved the world ...* John 3:16

God loved us enough to give up His only Son to die for our sins. Knowing and experiencing that love is crucial as we carry on a ministry to the elderly. Without continually being sustained by God's abiding love, without drawing deeply from the wells of salvation, there is no strength, no life, no joy in our ministry. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

John 10:27

The Bible is very clear about what it means to hear and follow Jesus. Matthew 25:31-46 gives some practical ways to follow—feeding the hungry, showing hospitality to strangers, giving clothes to the poor, visiting the sick and the prisoner. Are you willing to be not only a hearer of the word, but a doer of it also (Jas. 1:22)? If you aren't, says James, then you delude yourself.

*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* 1 John 3:16

One quality we should expect to see in a servant of Christ is a sacrificial love like His. Philipians 2 tells us that Christ gave up His heavenly home and became a servant, obeying God even to the point of death. This should be our standard of love—not merely words, but self-giving deeds (see 1 John 3:18).

*But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort.* 2 Cor. 1:6a

The Christian life is characterized by affliction—affliction that comes from knowing Christ, "and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:10). These afflictions may not require martyrdom, but they may involve sickness, loneliness, financial insecurity, rejection by friends, grief, or any number of the things that Christ suffered and in which we join Him. The comfort we receive from knowing that God's hand is on our life equips us to minister comfort and salvation to others. Is your response to

affliction like that of Paul who said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3)? Don’t be bitter about suffering; let it prepare you to comfort others.

What are some practical ways in which we can show our love for God and for others as faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ? One way is by simply being a good listener. Sometimes people just need to share their burdens and hopes and cares with another person. Be ready to respond with a sympathetic or encouraging word. Your role as a servant requires that you accept people as they are—it’s okay to be weary, confused, weak, even angry. Ask yourself what you can do to help their situation. Remember: we are commanded to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6.2).

Another way to show your love to the elderly is by being committed to regular visitation. This may be difficult at times, but if your motives are sincere, then a sacrificial attitude will be easier to maintain. Nurses have mentioned the negative effects of sporadic visitation, which increases depression and behavioral disorders. Consistent visitation, however, shows that we are true friends who deeply care about the individual.

A cheerful face is always encouraging for the elderly person—but remember to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). In a humble spirit, be prepared to share your faith in Christ at an appropriate time.

If this seems like a lot for one person, remember that you don’t have to be perfect! Trust in God to overcome insufficiencies and mistakes—then go ahead and enjoy making new friends.

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR MINISTRY IN NURSING HOMES

1. *Listeners:* For visitation ministries these volunteers are the most important. Almost anyone qualifies for this task. Suggest this role especially to those who think they are un-gifted or useless.
2. *Musicians:* Individuals, groups, vocalists, instrumentalists, the young (e.g., youth choirs), the old—all can be used in special programs or in worship services. Don't neglect recruiting song leaders who can help teach songs and lead nursing home residents in both familiar and new songs.
3. *Miscellaneous Performers:* They can be used in a talent show or special performance. Don't overlook any talents: storytelling, singing, dancing, poetry reading, joke telling and instrument playing (see "Conducting a Variety Show" in the appendix for some recommendations).
4. *Travelers and Naturalists:* Travelogues and nature presentations in the form of movies or slides are good since they provide visual interest to accompany the personal oral presentation.
5. *Artists and Crafts Specialists:* Use such people either to teach or to make a presentation/display of their specialties.
6. *Recreation and Tour Leaders:* Keep alert to activities that are suitable and not too taxing for elderly persons who are able to enjoy and participate. Church suppers and picnics provide opportunities for such volunteers.
7. *General Helpers:* These people can be used for bringing the elderly to worship services, helping them find hymns, leading in singing, or just giving moral support to others. Such volunteers are greatly appreciated and always needed.
8. *Preachers and Teachers:* Both the ordained and unordained are helpful for worship services and Bible studies.

# INITIATING A NURSING HOME MINISTRY

Beginning a ministry to the elderly in nursing homes may seem an overwhelming task to plan and implement. But it is precisely good planning that will help make your ministry happen.

Evaluate your resources—they are of prime importance in planning the type and scope of your ministry. Who will help you in this activity? How much time do you have? What gifts and interests do you and others have? All these factors will determine what type of ministry you can have (worship service, adopt-a-grandparent, room-to-room visitation, variety show, etc.), its frequency (weekly, bimonthly, monthly), and its magnitude (five people, one floor, a whole nursing home). As you evaluate your resources it is imperative to assess your commitment and motives as well.

Begin to gain an understanding of elderly people. Reading this manual is one way to start. Continue your reading among many helpful books listed in the bibliography. Perhaps you and others could visit several nursing homes in your area as an informal way of becoming acquainted with the situation of the elderly.

Assess the needs of the particular home you wish to visit. Naturally you will understand these needs much better as you become more involved. Begin by discovering what kinds of programs they already have and the general physical condition, morale and spiritual health of the residents.

Choose a program that is appropriate to the needs of the home, as well as to your own resources, interests and commitment. Pray that God will guide you in this important decision. Be prepared to adjust your plans as you gain a deeper understanding of the home and the individual elderly with whom you come in contact there.

Make an initial contact with the nursing home either by phone or in person. If there is an activities director, she (or he) would be someone to talk to in addition to the director. Explain who you are, whom you represent and what goals you have. Be as specific as you can be about your plans. How you word things is important. Some nursing home administrators may understand “evangelism” to mean “proselytizing.”

If they are willing for you to begin a program there, establish a time and place to begin. If possible, also arrange a meeting with the chief administrators: the director of nursing, the activities director and the director/administrator. You want to be sure to know all the responsible people in the home and to be known by them. Give them a clear and concise presentation of your goals, activities, etc. Make sure they know what church you represent, your pastor’s name, and the primary contact person they should call with their questions or suggestions.

As time progresses you will have an accepted (and hopefully valued) place in the life of the home. Consequently, you will have more freedom. Be prepared to go slowly and wait for the freedom to be given to you, rather than demanding too much too soon.

# LOOK CLOSER AND SEE THE REAL ME

(Found in a geriatric ward of a hospital in Scotland—Author unknown)

What do you see, tell me, what do you see?  
Who are you seeing when you look at me?  
A crabby old woman, not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with far away eyes  
Who seems not to notice the things that you do,  
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe.  
Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, for you're not seeing me.

I'll say who I am as I sit here so still,  
As I rise at your bidding and eat at your will.  
I'm a small child of 10 with a father and mother,  
Sisters and brothers who love one another.  
A young girl of 16 with wings on her feet,  
Dreaming that soon her true sweetheart she'll meet.  
A bride at just 20, my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the vows I promised to keep.  
At 25, now I have babes of my own  
Who need me to build a secure happy home.  
A woman of 30, my children grow fast,  
Bound to each other with ties that will last.  
At 40, my grown-up sons will be gone,  
But my man stays beside me to see I don't mourn.  
At 50, once more babies play round my knee,  
Again we know children, my loved one and me.  
Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead,  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.  
My children are busy with babes of their own,  
I think of the years and the love I have known.

I'm an old woman now, grace and vigor depart,  
But thousands of memories live in my heart.  
Inside it, you see, a girl still dwells,  
And now and again my tired heart swells.  
I remember the joy, I think of the pain,  
And I'm loving and living life over again.  
So open your eyes, please open and see.  
Not a crabby old woman, look closer—see me!