Churches are failing to tap into the potential of older members of the congregation, argues James Woodward

Churches should be conscious that older people feel challenged in their beliefs as they cope with losses, and can be looking for help to come to terms with past experiences. We need to respond to these questions rather than change the subject: this is important theological work.

The Church also needs to be prepared to give time to the harvesting of memories as a resource for bringing souls to Christ. Some older people are natural evangelists. They have time for people and for spiritual friendships. Their lives often reflect many of the virtues of discipleship: empathy, sacrifice, and the understanding of the world.

We should act as beacons of intergenerational activity, so that the young may learn from the old, and visa versa, and that neither is seen as more important than the other. I am not suggesting that the Church sack all youth workers, and begin to employ older people. We should work to build all-age communities, where older people are a respected part of the body of Christ. We do this, we might combat some of the fears that surround ageing. We must also exercise pastoral imagination.

Older people are an overlooked majority, who deserve our energy. They are our natural spiritual constituency — let us stop apologising for them.

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