

Reflection by Jo Patterson

Approaching the final year of my CRCW training at Northern College, Manchester, it's easy to reflect on just how quickly time has flown since I started my learning journey. I am currently in the second of my two-year placement projects – at St Paul's Anglican Church in Brixton, South London – and enjoying the challenging diversity it brings me daily.

Across a varied and interesting programme, I have many 'hats' at St Paul's...and that's exactly how I like it! As well as working with Lambeth Citizen's, Christians Against Poverty (CAP), leading worship and undertaking pastoral work, I also lead the Seniors Community Group.

Sharing this role with Lovett, I really value the experience and insight of our energised, inspirational - and vocal! – group of older church members and local people. There is no lower age limit, but I am by far the youngest member at the moment. We meet fortnightly and have a varied program of visiting guests, bible study, reflection and food! Hospitality is very important and we make the most of every opportunity to eat together. Our topics are decided by the group, often leading us down avenues that I would not have expected.

Since Easter we have been discussing “what do I prepare for the end of my life?” A difficult – but necessary - topic. I say 'difficult' because for me it is, but for those approaching their later years there comes a point where these important decisions have to be made. One member told me that there is an, often sudden, realization that you have less time left than you have already lived. We tackled funeral arrangements, end of life care, wills, legacies and lasting powers of attorney. We also discussed health issues and 'do not resuscitate' orders. Difficult topics indeed, but discussed with Christ at the core – and much grace and laughter! The inevitability of what is to come can be tackled in a human way that recognizes the journey we are all on – albeit at varying points...

It is a huge privilege for me to be in this group of amazing people, who so freely share their life experiences, their worries and their stories with generosity and humor. And tackle the difficult things of life, with food, love and laughter. So, my reflection is; do we have to get older to be this open with others? Can we start a bit earlier? More importantly, I've certainly learnt that age is not a barrier to anything!