

Age

Module

2



Equality, Diversity
and Inclusion Toolkit

The **Methodist** Church 



The EDI Toolkit is updated according to a regular schedule. If you see anything you think needs revising, or have any other feedback, please get in touch by contacting equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk

REMINDER

The Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work

A document called *Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work* is provided separately. All participants should have a copy of this when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once, and made aware that this is the starting point for all our work on EDI issues in the Methodist Church.

Module 2

Age

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Introduction

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) toolkit builds on the mandatory EDI training for all those in leadership within the Methodist Church, including Ministers, Stewards, Local Preachers and Worship Leaders, and employed Lay Workers. The mandatory training introduces EDI work within the Methodist Church, including examining the legal context, the role of unconscious bias, and the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity adopted by the Methodist Conference of 2021. One of the learning objectives of the mandatory training was to “be able to continue personal EDI development through self-directed learning.” The EDI toolkit provides an opportunity to do that through a series of modules which build on the mandatory training. It begins with an Introductory Module, which includes the Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work, and then consists of a series of main modules, of which this is one.

The EDI Toolkit can be used in various ways. It is suitable for any area of church life, including house groups, leadership teams and continuing learning for preachers and worship leaders. This module can be completed as a single session. Alternatively, these materials can be used as a resource to respond to a particular issue. Selected resources or activities from this module could be used or adapted for use in worship or small groups. The materials can also be read by individuals as part of their individual commitment to EDI learning.

How long does it take?

The module can be used in various ways, and you will need to adapt the timings according to your group and context. However, if you are completing this module in one 90-minute session, you may find these suggested timings useful:

Welcome	Worship	EXPLORE	APPLY and REFLECT	EXTEND and preparation for next session	Worship
5 mins	10 mins	20 mins	45 mins	Minimal	10 mins

Pastoral concerns

This session was designed, as far as possible, to encourage full participation of all those attending. The facilitator needs to be aware that people may be reluctant to contribute, perhaps because of personal experience of discrimination, bullying or prejudice. We would therefore recommend that you encourage participants to respect one another – particularly respecting confidentiality (where it does not infringe on good safeguarding protocol).

There may be a danger of some participants dominating the discussion if they have a lot to say. We therefore encourage you to circulate the discussion groups if you think this will help. You could also introduce different facilitation tools, such as using a 'speaking object' (like a ball, talking stick etc) or allowing people to write feedback as well as verbalising it. This can maximise opportunities for all to participate.

Finally, there is also a risk that some people participating in this session will be upset by the topic under discussion. The sensitivity of the subject needs to be acknowledged at the start of the session and participants need to be aware of the different ways in which they can seek support to help deal with issues – both during the session and afterwards. Whilst it is important, as outlined above, that participants have equal opportunities to speak if they wish, this should always be optional.

You may want to have a separate space for worship, which could also be used as reflective space if anyone needs to take time out. You should also consider Chaplaincy provision, during the event if possible or afterwards if necessary. Your district or local EDI Officer may be able to assist you in sourcing appropriate Chaplaincy provision.

Equality Impact Assessments

The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment at: methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/EIA

This is a way of reviewing the things we do now and those we plan to do in the future. This process helps ensure that our

practices are fair and inclusive, and that no individual or group of people is inadvertently disadvantaged. This enables us to anticipate and remove or reduce any negative impact.

The EDI Toolkit is designed to help us learn about a range of issues that can affect people within our fellowship and society. But learning is not sufficient. We also need action, to change our processes and procedures to ensure church meets everyone's needs including those who do not attend. The Equality Impact Assessment also prompts us to think inclusively. We may have a brilliant idea that will meet the needs of some people in our church or community. Collaboratively completing an Equality Impact Assessment ensures a range of different voices are involved in planning and decision making, so that all people are taken into account in our activities.

Opening worship

One more step along the world I go
Singing the Faith 476

Jeremiah 1:4-8
Luke 2:23-38

Prayer

God of love, help us today to watch for you carefully,
work for you simply,
and rest in you gratefully, through Jesus Christ,
Amen.

(Christina Le Moignan)

EXPLORE

1 Introduction

The aim of this module is to consider how ageism and assumptions about age affect people in everyday life and in the life of the Church. It is an opportunity to consider the gifts and insights that people have at various stages of life. The approach considers people's stories. It looks at our own experiences of ageism and where in church life we need to be particularly aware of ageism and the impact it has.

2 The journey to date

In the mid-twentieth century, life expectancy was considerably shorter than today. Children were expected to 'be seen and not heard', the term teenager was not widely used and because extended families often lived closer together, both Church and society were generally more intergenerational.

Many positive changes have taken place, including legal protection against age discrimination in the workplace (Equality Act 2006) and in the provision of goods and services (Equality Act 2010). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) aims to ensure that every child and young person can fulfil their potential, with an emphasis on freedom, respect, non-discrimination and human dignity. However, for reasons of safety and protection, the law still has minimum age limits on the sale of tobacco and alcohol, gambling, etc. Employers may no longer set a compulsory retirement age, and the state retirement age is gradually rising. This reflects both the increase in life expectancy and the degree to which older people are more physically active than in previous generations.

However, in church life, we have seen a decline in the numbers of younger people – especially young families – regularly attending churches. We often speak of 'missing generations', including people in middle age. Modern life, technology and working patterns impact very significantly on families – and the generations within a family – and Church, which presents both opportunities and challenges.

Today, the Methodist Church is committed to the full participation of all age groups and the use of people's skills and talents. At the Methodist Conference of 2021, the following resolution was passed:

29/4. The Conference reaffirms the importance of hearing the voices of children and young people in discerning future direction and directs the Council and connexional committees, when revising strategic policies, to ensure that there is consultation with under 12s, under 18s and under 23s as well as with other groups.

The reality, however, does not always match this ambition. This is often because of age-related assumptions by individuals, and/or that traditional ways of doing things do not respect and meet the needs of different generations.

3Generate, the annual Methodist children's and youth assembly, aims to create an inclusive and diverse space for the prophetic voice of children and young people to emerge and be heard. It enables them to speak courageously and listen to God and each other. Through the 3Generate process, children and young people are equipped to become participants in advocacy, change and growth and have an impact in their local Methodist communities. 3Generate calls the Church to listen to, and be in relationship and dialogue with and amongst, children and young people. This is so the community can make and experience change together. You can find out more here: 3generate.org.uk.

3 Introductory activity – Guess who?

In this activity (included in the Appendix), we give you the names and ages of ten people. Below them are seventeen statements, each of which applies to at least one person. Working on your own, with a facilitator or in a group, try to match the statements to a person. The answers are on the following page – but no peeking.

Think about your reasons for matching the statements to the person.

Then look at the answer page, which gives you a paragraph of further information on each person. Does this new information challenge or confirm what you thought?

Consider:

- What surprised you?
- How do you think people's assumptions about age might have affected those ten people? What about assumptions concerning gender or disability?
- Has anyone made assumptions about you because of your age? How did that feel?

Learning point

This exercise aims to help you explore the assumptions that are made about people based on their age. Some of the personal profiles may be surprising. As a Church (like society) we sometimes underuse people's talents because of what we assume people can or can't do.

APPLY and REFLECT

1 Case studies

This section contains case studies for you to reflect on in small teams.

Each team should consider at least two of the stories. If possible, all stories should be looked at by at least one team. There will be an opportunity to offer feedback to the whole group.

Each of these is a true story, although names and some details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

The stories reflect the choice of language of the individuals concerned in describing their story.

At the end of each story, there are questions to consider. It may be helpful to refer to the SCIP classification from the Introductory Module. Here is a headline reminder of the SCIP classification:

- **Structural** – eg legal and political structures, policies, committees etc
- **Cultural** – the cultural norms of a group or society, commonly held views
- **Institutional** – practices, how things are done
- **Personal** – personal behaviours and practices.

Consider the questions that follow each story. As you do, reflect on what the key words, emotions and issues are for the people in those stories.

Francesca's story

Francesca has recently moved to a new area, having started her first job after leaving university. The church she has joined does not have many young members, although the leadership of the church are keen to change this. As soon as Francesca was accepted into the church community, members and stewards started coming up to her and asking if she was interested in working with the children and young people in the church. Francesca has been politely refusing, as she doesn't believe that to be where her talents lie. Despite mentioning to the minister and

members of the church that she has a passion for outreach and that she would be very happy to be involved in this area of the church's ministry, people continue only to consider her for children and youth work.

Recently Francesca has started to hear comments about how young people are selfish and won't give their time to the church. This has left Francesca frustrated and hurt, and she is considering moving to another church.

Questions

Experience

- What assumptions were made about Francesca?
- Why do you think people made those assumptions?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

Learning

- What could be the consequences of Francesca's experience – both for her and the local church?
- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?

Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Jim's story

Jim works full time and has two children. Having recently gone through a divorce, he is greatly thankful to his church and its members and feels that he wants to give something back and help the church. The church recently established a mission committee to try to help it be more of a presence in the community and attract a broader demographic of people. Jim saw this as the perfect opportunity and was gratefully accepted into the group. When Jim received the notice of the first meeting, he saw that it was scheduled for during the working day and he would be unable to attend.

When he pointed this out to the chair of the group, he was told that almost everyone who volunteers to be on committees is retired and that they do not like to be out in the evenings. Jim then raised the problem with the minister. Although she was sympathetic, she told him that church meetings had always been held during the day and they couldn't afford to lose the support of the older members. Jim was forced to withdraw from the committee and now gives his time volunteering with a local charity.

Questions

Experience

- What assumptions were made in this story and about whom?
- Has anything similar happened in your experience?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could a situation like this, or others that you can think of, impact people like Jim?
- How would it impact on the mission of the church? For example, what has the church lost by not having Jim involved?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Sarah's story

Sarah is a young lawyer, recently qualified and working for a large law firm. She has attended the church of which she is a member since childhood, and many members of the church have known her since she was very young. Despite a very busy working life, Sarah has volunteered her services to the church and sits on two church committees. Although she has tried to be patient and understanding, Sarah has grown increasingly frustrated by the attitudes of those around her in the church. She is frequently ignored during committee meetings. There is an attitude that the older you are the more you know about the church. She has even been ignored on matters relating to property law, her professional expertise.

The attitudes towards her are particularly difficult from those who have known her the longest. She often feels patronised and that those members especially are still treating her as a child.

Although she didn't initially want to mention it, worrying that people would point to it as evidence of childish behaviour, Sarah has recently spoken to the minister. At Sarah's request, he has agreed not to confront people directly. However, he will ensure that during meetings at which he is present, Sarah will have the opportunity to speak and contribute. They have agreed that the best way to address the situation is to give Sarah the opportunity to demonstrate her abilities.

Questions

Experience

- Why do you think Sarah is being treated the way she is?
- Have you ever had a similar experience to Sarah's?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- Who has the power (the authority and/or skills) to change the situation?

Action

- What should happen next in this story?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Doreen's story

Doreen has been looking for a church where she feels she belongs – this has involved moving to other churches on more than one occasion. She has felt that many of the churches she has attended, of different denominations, have had nothing aimed at her, a single person in her 30s. The last church Doreen attended was attempting to modernise and had recently introduced a projector for prayers and hymn words. Doreen enjoyed and felt fulfilled by her first service there and looked forward to attending again. When sitting in the congregation before the next service, a steward who Doreen hadn't met came up to her. He explained that there was a problem with the audio-visual (AV) equipment and that as a 'young person' Doreen would be able to help them.

Without being asked her name or whether she had any experience with AV equipment, she was dragged to the projector and left to fix it. Despite little expertise with technology, and unhelpful and disparaging comments from members of the congregation while she was having difficulty, she eventually got the projector to work. Rather than being thanked, she was informed that she would be expected to run the AV from that point onwards.

Frustrated, Doreen felt that she could no longer attend the church.

Doreen has now started attending a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) where she feels people have not prejudged her but are really getting to know her.

Questions

Experience

- What assumptions were made about Doreen, and why?
- Has anything similar happened in your experience?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- Whilst Doreen has moved on to the LEP, what are the consequences for the church she left?

Action

- What should happen next in this story?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Desmond's story

Desmond has noticed that a residential care home for older people has opened near to his church. He feels that the church has a pastoral care responsibility to the residents and that this presents a good opportunity for mission to the older generation.

Desmond mentioned this at church and suggested that some time and effort be expended in building relationships with the residents of the care home. He was

told that “the church does enough for the elderly already”, and that it was focused on young people and the ‘missing generation’. When pressed, one church leader argued that young people are “more important because there are jobs in the church which need doing”. These kinds of comments have led Desmond to question the motivation for evangelism and mission in the church, as well as its attitude to those unable to come to the church building.

Questions

Experience

- From your experience, how do people feel about being defined by their age?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could a situation like this, or others that you can think of, impact on the mission of the Church? Is Desmond right about questioning this church's motivation for mission?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Jean's story

Jean is in her late 70s and has been a well-known church member for 50 years. For the last 20 years of her career, she worked as a computer scientist at the university, and she was an early adopter of home computing. Despite many people knowing this, Jean is never asked to help when it comes to anything to do with IT in church.

Questions

Experience

- What assumptions were made in this story and about whom?
- Has anything similar happened in your experience?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could a situation like this, or others that you can think of, impact people like Jean?
- How would it impact on the mission of the church? For example, what has the church lost by not having Jean involved?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

John's story

John spent much of his life involved in youth work at the churches he attended. He is now physically frail but mentally alert. He lives in a care home and is unable to get to church. After making contact with the youth leader at a local church, and drumming up support from other residents, a small group of 16- and 17-year-olds who are struggling at college now visit the home for support with basic literacy and numeracy skills and job applications.

Questions

Experience

- From your experience, in what ways can the experience and skills of older people be used to support those from younger generations?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could a situation like this, or others that you can think of, impact on the mission of the Church?

Action

- What opportunities for similar types of mission can you think of?
- Who could be responsible for implementing those kinds of projects in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Fred's story

Fred is a retired English teacher and is now resident in a care home. He is unsteady on his feet and uses a walking frame but gets to church whenever a lift is available. Fred would love to read in church from time to time but was told it wouldn't be safe for him to get up the steps to the dais where the lectern is situated.

Questions

Experience

- Why do you think Fred is being treated the way he is?
- Have you noticed or experienced people being treated in a similar way?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could a situation like this, or others that you can think of, impact people like Fred?
- How would it impact on the mission of the church? For example, what has the church lost by not having Fred involved?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

Marion's story

Marion is 57 and has been diagnosed with early onset dementia. She is finding it hard to come to terms with this and hasn't shared it outside her family. When she was asked to be Church Council Secretary, she regretfully declined, citing her diagnosis and saying that she was concerned that she might lose her way during a meeting and not record accurate minutes. The minister's response was "Nonsense, you're far too young to have dementia." Marion sensed that they thought she was making excuses.

Questions

Experience

- Have you ever experienced assumptions about disability or impairment being made because of someone's age?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?
- How could this situation impact Marion?
- How would it impact on the mission of the church? For example, what might the church lose by treating Marion in this way?

Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?

Bruce's story

Bruce is 11 years old and has been attending his local Methodist church with his grandmother since he was three. He is quite shy and usually stays fairly quiet in church. However, in a recent Sunday morning service the minister asked for volunteers to help plan and run an event for Refugee Week. Bruce is a keen reader and has just finished the book *The boy at the back of the class*, which has left him wanting to do something to help

children who have had to leave their home country because of conflict. Feeling really excited about the opportunity to make a difference, he approached the Minister straight after the service. The minister looked surprised at Bruce's offer of help and, rather awkwardly, started to make excuses as to why "it's just not possible" for Bruce to be involved as he is too young and planning the event is "adult work."

Questions

Experience

- What assumptions were made about Bruce?
- Why do you think the minister made those assumptions? Is there any basis for them? What might the minister be afraid of?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

Learning

- What could be the consequences of Bruce's experience – both for him and the local church? What opportunities have been missed?
- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made by people in this story?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?

Camilla's story

Camilla is 16 and regularly attends both the Sunday service and the Friday night youth fellowship at her local Methodist Church. With the encouragement of her youth worker, she has shown some real promise as a young leader. She was recently asked to attend Church Council meetings to represent the young people of the church and she was really excited to accept.

In the days leading up to the meeting she enthusiastically talked with her peers about the meeting's agenda and gathered some thoughts on some of the topics to be covered and the things they would like her to raise. However, at the meeting itself she found the discussions very confusing, and she struggled to engage in the conversations. At one point she put

her hand up to ask a question about a financial matter that was being debated, but she was told there was no time to explain and, as she was too young to have an actual vote, it wasn't for her to worry about anyway.

At the end of the meeting, she felt like she'd let her fellow youth fellowship members down – as they'd wanted her to suggest introducing one or two more modern worship songs in the Sunday service and switching to Fairtrade tea and coffee for the fellowship time and she hadn't felt able to mention either. As she was leaving, feeling very deflated, she overheard a few of the Church Council members talking about how wonderful it was to have youth participation.

Questions

Experience

- Why do you think Camilla felt deflated by her experience? What might be the consequences of her experience?
- What resonated with your own experience of church meetings?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal assumptions were made in this story?
- Who has the power – the authority and/or skills – to change the situation?

Action

- What could have been done differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of our social characteristics: our ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and so on. These overlap and create interdependent systems of discrimination and advantage. Being aware of intersectionality means we can better acknowledge and understand the differences among us.

There is no hierarchy of protected characteristics. There is no hierarchy of discrimination. Different forms of discrimination and exclusion will affect different numbers of people in different ways and at different times, but no single characteristic is more central to our experience of being human. Within the Methodist Church, we aim to go beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Acts of Great Britain and the Isle of Man; the Discrimination (Jersey) Law; the Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance; and the Equal Opportunities Act in Gibraltar. Instead, we consider all power dynamics within the church, such as socio-economic factors and the relationships between lay and ordained. In all our relationships and processes, we seek justice; for all to be treated with dignity; and to stand in solidarity with those who have experienced discrimination or exclusion.

None of our characteristics are lived in a vacuum. We all have a range of other personal and social attributes that affect our lived experiences. Therefore, each of our lived experiences will be unique.

For example, everyone will have different experiences of aging. Some of us will become increasingly dependent on others once we are no longer able to earn an income for ourselves. For others, retirement will be the time of greatest financial independence in our lives. Many of us will experience disability and impairment as we grow older, but these experiences will all be different. Some of us will grow old together with a partner. Others will grow old alone and may experience profound solitude and isolation, though this will not be the experience of everyone growing old alone.

Bias in the provision of health services, due to ethnicity or socio-economic status, may affect the quality of life we enjoy as we grow older.

These are just a few examples, and we cannot possibly consider all the different experiences people have of aging. The important thing is to be mindful that growing older is experienced in many ways and to always consider how different personal and social characteristics intersect to form our unique lived experiences. This applies to how we experience other ages too. We therefore cannot make assumptions and should always listen to and learn from the experiences of others.

We are all made in the image of God, across all our differences. Together in our diversity, we make up the Body of Christ. So, as we learn more about one another, we draw closer to Christ. Becoming more aware of intersectionality helps us to do this.

If you know of a story that may help improve the diversity of experiences within the case studies in this module, or would be willing to share your own story, please contact [**equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk**](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

3 Summary questions and learning points

Summary questions

While thinking about your answers to the questions and issues raised in the case studies, reflect on:

- what you have learnt
- what the stories might mean in your church
- what you will do.

Learning points

- Age discrimination affects people at all stages of life.
- People are often pigeonholed (stereotyped) by age.
- People's gifts, talents, interests and energy are not dictated by their age.
- The culture and practices of churches (eg what they focus on and customary practices) can make the church unwelcoming to people.
- By getting to know people and finding out about their gifts, talents and interests, churches can make people feel more welcome and useful.
- Using the talents that people have – rather than what we assume they have – is good for the life and mission of the Church.
- Ageism is not inevitable. It is possible to change attitudes, culture and practice to make all ages feel welcome.

EXTEND

For further study or personal reflection. Keep for use with other modules

Contents

1. Theological underpinning
2. Creating space for children and young people
3. Adult discipleship
4. Equality Impact Assessments

1 Theological underpinning

Theological Underpinning and Theological Resources for Reflection, which is provided as a separate document, has been approved by both the EDI Committee and the Faith and Order Committee. It states:

Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-7), and are loved by God. Each one of us is unique and valued by God, and thus the intrinsic worth of every human being is to be upheld. Such worth is afforded through the act of being created and is not related to the behaviour of human beings, nor to their stage in life from birth to death. (Paragraph 4)

For reflection and further consideration

Along with others in your church/circuit consider:

- What could your church and circuit do to find out the vision and hope of different age groups in your context?
- How does each age group see the mission of the local church in relation to other people in their own age group?
- How could these different aspirations be turned into a vision for your church's mission?

2 Creating space for children and young people

For children and young people to flourish, they need to be completely embedded and fully participating in local Christian community as part of the Body of Christ. This should be a community where all ages together pray, listen, notice, discuss and explore what God is calling them to, and commit to be active as disciples in the world. With this in mind, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the Children, Youth and Family Team launched the 365 initiative in 2021. This includes a Toolbox designed to help children and young people - with support from their leaders - to explore what God might be saying to them. It encourages them to discern calling and take action. You can still find this Toolbox, which contains lots of useful resources, at: methodist.org.uk/media/21936/365-brochure.pdf

A short Bible study

This Bible study is adapted from work carried out as part of the 365 initiative.

Children and young people are called by God to serve, just as adults are. Therefore, mission and ministry are both for and with children and young people, as well as adults. We need to help children and young people to understand the nature of calling and the importance of serving, and to see this as part of the journey of being a disciple. The wider Church needs to recognise, release and respond to the prophetic voice of children and young people.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-19 and consider:

- What strikes you about this passage? What might God be saying to you as you read?
- Although he worked in the Temple, Samuel did not yet have a personal relationship with God (verse 7). Therefore, what does this story tell us?
- The message that God asked Samuel to deliver was not an easy one. How does this challenge us about ministry with and amongst children?

- What does this story tell us about how we can facilitate and curate spaces for children and young people to be heard? Who holds the responsibility for making this happen?

In 1 Samuel 3 we read about the Lord's call for Samuel to be a prophet. Samuel was only 12 years old and had been a servant of the Temple since the age of four. A prophet is one who speaks for God to the people and offers challenge. Samuel – at the age of 12 – was called to be prophetic and began the great tradition of the prophets in Israel, bridging the time between the Judges and the Prophets.

Eli gave Samuel good advice. He was not to ask the Lord for his heart's desire or for help solving problems. No, Samuel was to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." The Hebrew word used here that is translated as 'listening' means 'to hear with a view to obeying'. God draws out Samuel's spiritual gifts and calls him to also recognise them and respond. Eli, though not a good priest and far from perfect in his ministry, also recognises God's call on Samuel and empowers and instructs him to listen. Afterwards, Eli calls Samuel to account and encourages him to deliver the message, however difficult. Samuel goes on to spend a whole lifetime listening and responding with action to God's call.

You could also read Genesis 1:27-28, Genesis 2:19-20 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Then consider the following questions:

- How does God invite us all to participate?
- What other Biblical examples are there of people being invited to participate – either through taking responsibility for their own faith journey or through being invited to shape God's mission?
- Why might children and young people struggle to find their place in the body of Christ? How can we encourage and support them to do so?

What individuals in churches can do

- Pray for children and young people, that they will expect to hear from God and be brave enough to share what they hear God saying.
- Pray for those working with children and young people.
- Pray for your own journey as a disciple. Be open to where God is leading children and young people. In doing so, be open to where God is leading the Church, including you.
- Tell others your story. Think about your story. How did you get to this place? Who were your influences? What were your struggles? Consider the best way to tell your story.
- Discover the stories of children and young people. Listen to stories of their spiritual journeys and everyday lives.
- Ask children and young people what God might have been saying to them recently.

What churches can do

- Pray as a church for children and young people and those working with them.
- Look at the themes that children and young people are discussing during 3Generate and are discussing in their local context with their groups.
- Make space for children and young people to be part of the full life of the church through continued opportunities to explore and develop vocation and discipleship.

3Generate

Information about 3Generate Children and Youth Assembly can be found at 3generate.org.uk

Further resources and wider reading

The Well is the name given to the work done to resource and equip children's and youth leaders in the Methodist Church. There are lots of helpful videos to watch on The Well Learning Hub YouTube channel. These include the following webinars from The Well:

- Exploring calling and discernment in children and young people: [youtube.com/watch?v=t17IPdmY4XY&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=10](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t17IPdmY4XY&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=10)
- The prophetic voice of children and young people: [youtube.com/watch?v=VW_5G5y562o&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW_5G5y562o&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=5)
- Involving children and young people in mission planning: [youtube.com/watch?v=arWLtpQ4sL4&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arWLtpQ4sL4&list=PLWdkHMKBZJbHm_ryU4Qvg7MhsZPSTWXjR&index=9)

The Well also has a section on the Methodist Church website with lots of resources to download. These include the Voice Activated resource (methodist.org.uk/voiceactivated), which was created as a culmination of the Methodist Youth Participation Strategy.

3 Adult discipleship

The changing nature of adult life

Historically, a human life could be divided into three stages: childhood, working adulthood, and a final stage of declining health and dependency (though of course not everyone lives to experience every stage). However, this has changed in our post-industrial society.

For the first time in human history, our map of life consists not of three stages but four.

The suddenness with which this new shape to our lives has come about makes it unsurprising that we fumble for ways of making sense of this apparent gift of extra years.

(Ann Morisy)

The term 'third age' is used frequently and is defined as a period of 'active retirement', which is sometimes labelled the 'new middle age.' It is distinct from the 'fourth age' which includes more dependent people who are less robust due to declining health and increasing frailty. Neither category wholly correlates with chronological age. When we talk about increasing life expectancy, what we want is a longer third age, especially if we have the financial means to enjoy it. Medical advances and the associated longer life expectancy has led to an increasing proportion of people living an active life well into their 70s. People reaching the traditional retirement age now may have many years of active life – hence the need to differentiate between a third age and an older, more dependent fourth age.

In 2013, the Methodist Council received a paper called Third Age Discipleship, MC/13/40. The full report can be accessed here: [Methodist Council papers 13-15 April 2013](#)

The report noted that this changing demographic profile has implications for churches. Church congregations tend to have higher age profiles than the wider population, and older people constitute a significant proportion of church membership and attendance in most denominations.

An example of the impact of this is that there has been a marked increase in the number of older candidates aged between 50 and 60 for ordained ministries.

Attitudes to older people in society and in the Church

The recovery of a full and rich sense of dignity at every age and in every condition is an imperative if we are serious about the respect we universally owe each other that respect grounded for Christians in the divine image which is to be discerned in old and young alike.

(Dr Rowan Williams, speaking at a House of Lords debate on the place of older people in society, his last as Archbishop of Canterbury)

The reality of an aging population has meant investment has been needed to maintain older people's independence. Whilst the benefits of engaging with the older segment of the population are increasingly recognised, there continues, nonetheless, to be some negative stereotyping of older people. Often, they are not valued or deemed capable of contributing to a society that tends to celebrate 'progress' and 'innovation'. Some of these assumptions are carried into the Church context. There is a prevalent view of older people as passive recipients rather than as "those with ministries to fulfil (Hawley and Jewell)" who have something to offer the Church. This has implications for the extent to which older people are given the opportunity to contribute in ways which enable them to use their gifts and follow their calling. The common belief that older people are averse to change also impacts on perceptions and attitudes within the Church. There are also related assumptions about older people lacking interest and finding learning difficult; that they are satisfied with what is offered; that they feel 'known' and valued, and have a sense of belonging; that they are secure in their faith and beliefs and no longer have questions; and that they prefer to avoid difficult subjects such as death (Hawley and Jewell).

Anxiety about Methodist congregations ageing has led to great efforts to retain and attract children and young people, and to reach the 'missing generations'. Whilst there is no

intention to dismiss the importance of older members of the Church, these expressions of anxiety can lead older people to feel keenly that they are not a priority. This contributes to a feeling of marginalisation.

Discussion point: What does this mean for the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church?

Models and approaches to ageing used by the Church

Jesus' bias towards marginalised and silenced persons within the broader community, as well as charging his followers to do likewise, gives the Church an imperative to counter society's ageism by listening to and empowering older people.

(Janet Eldred)

Whilst some of our churches have responded to issues raised by an ageing population, the focus has tended to be on providing pastoral care. This reflects an emphasis on problems faced by those deemed to be in their fourth age. Third age issues have been given less attention. Some of the assumptions already identified have led to an approach which is typified by ministering **to** older people rather than **with** them. The focus is generally on pastoral care rather than spiritual development. Older people, even in their fourth age, still have a contribution to make to the worship, pastoral care and spiritual development of others. They can still have agency rather than be passive recipients.

Sessions and activities are often provided by the Church in age-segregated groups with older people meeting in the daytime and other age groups in the evenings. There are practical reasons for this and sometimes age segregation is appropriate; but inter-generational opportunities are also needed to increase mutual understanding and sharing.

People in their third age are 'used' within the Church, but often to fill gaps left by younger members. They are rarely asked to contribute by virtue of the experience and perspective they can offer because of their age. People in the fourth age are rarely asked to contribute at all.

Discussion point: What does this mean for the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church?

Perspectives on ageing

Different perspectives on ageing result in different approaches. Seeing ageing as a difficulty – something to be feared – leads to interventions aimed at avoiding illness and dependence. A different perspective accepts age as part of God's created order; stresses God's presence in the losses, pains and fears associated with age; regards life as a journey; and sees age as having a function. This alternative perspective brings together principles of human development with an understanding of faith development.

Each generation also has different norms and expectations. What applies to those in their third and fourth age today may not apply to the rising generation of older people.

Third and fourth age learning and discipleship

I would like the church to answer MY questions rather than THEIR questions. I believe that some older people do become more questioning and reflective, and learning for me should be about rediscovering meaning and purpose on our journey. I should like to share some of these discoveries with others.

(Elderly man quoted in Woodward, Valuing Age, cited in Going on Growing)

Recognising the continuing spiritual journey of older people in the Church leads to questions about what opportunities can and should be provided to help them find wholeness and integrity. Completing the spiritual tasks of ageing involves searching, asking questions and drawing on experience to create meaning. Workshops and small groups can enable people to explore questions and concerns, and can provide relief from facing questions alone. Within these groups, some interactive Bible study, and even role playing, can be particularly helpful. For example, Deep Talk on Respecting Communities is available at deep-talk.blog. Deep Talk uses principles and processes similar to Godly Play to enable

groups to explore stories and face challenges together. More information on developing Deep Talk training is also available on this blog at deep-talk.blog/developing-deep-talk-training

Such groups may involve an element of storytelling and spiritual reminiscence as vehicles for helping people to understand their own life journeys and create personal meaning. Storytelling can also be approached in other ways and settings. Pastoral carers, for example, might focus on the skilled listener aspect of their role, rather than becoming merely a provider of comfort. This approach challenges any compulsion by carers to work to avoid distress and, in doing so, acknowledges the older person's true feelings:

Sometimes people cry or become upset as they speak of difficult or sad times. There is a feeling in aged care that people should be happy all the time or be jollied out of feeling sad. By continually demeaning the older person's feelings or not taking these seriously, we encourage lack of communication.

(MacKinlay, cited in Going on Growing)

As we age, we are more likely to experience degenerative conditions and progressive illnesses that affect our memory and ability to communicate. In a culture that places a high value on intellect, reason, fitness and speed of thought, people can equate a decline in one's neurological function with a decline in one's personhood. But though someone might no longer be the 'person they used to be,' that does not mean they are not a person at all. Our ability to relate to one another, and to God, changes but continues as our brain function deteriorates. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, including the effects of ageing:

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God

(Romans 8:38-39, NRSVue)

Pastoral care requires us to view people living with progressive conditions not as problems to be solved but as people to be

appreciated and loved. We may lose our knowledge and our memories, but we do not lose the ability to respond to Jesus' call to follow him and be his disciples. Sometimes people prefer to remember someone as 'the person they used to be.' This fails to value the person they are now, and it also leaves them vulnerable to solitude and loneliness.

People living with progressive conditions often participate in worship in ways they wouldn't have done previously, such as responding to music. For example, dementia does not erase people's memories. Rather, the neural pathways required to access that memory become blocked. But the brain can open new ones, such as through music, enabling people to continue with their spiritual life. When the music stops, so does the access to the memory. There is still value in being with someone and sharing that moment: the moment itself is precious. Church pastoral visitors and carers are not healthcare professionals there to provide treatment: they are emissaries of Jesus' love.

More information on caring for both the physical and spiritual needs of those experiencing progressive conditions can be found at:

- Dementia friendly churches | MWiB at mwib.org.uk
- MHA | Live Later Life Well at mha.org.uk
- Alzheimer's Society at alzheimers.org.uk
- Nubian Life at nubianlife.org.uk which also gives guidance on culturally specific care.

As we age, we are also more likely to experience reduced mobility. This may affect our ability to travel to certain buildings or events, such as church services. It does not impact our ability to experience God or journey in discipleship. Module 4 of this toolkit gives guidance on how to avoid structuring our buildings and communal church life in a way that requires a certain level of mobility.

A topic which inevitably provokes different degrees of anxiety is facing death. It is also a topic which is usually avoided. Research shows that talking about death and dying can be a relief, and that talking honestly and sharing fears and hopes

brings people closer (for example, see Talking about dying at [cancerresearchuk.org/](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/)). However, many older people struggle to find anyone willing to have this conversation. The fact that those in the Church are, arguably, influenced by the prevalent contemporary thinking that death is a failure may add to reluctance to address the subject. An increasing number of resources have, however, been produced, with the suggestion that there is significant value in 'educating' for death. Again, discussion in small groups can be very effective if properly facilitated. A one-to-one approach may also be helpful, with the possibility of a designated 'accompanist' to help the older person reflect and intentionally prepare – a 'midwife' for dying (Going on Growing). MHA (which provides accommodation, care, and support to older people) have developed a new workshop, 'The Last Taboo: Talking about death and dying', which will be delivered collaboratively with the Learning Network. Similarly, support for those who have been bereaved can involve learning and accompanied reflection, as well as special services of remembrance.

Provision for older people including those who may have no prior knowledge of or background in the Christian faith also needs attention. Structured events run by the MHA and by other organisations such as PSALM are important in this respect.

Discussion point: What does this mean for the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church?

Third and fourth age service and ministry

All this requires an acknowledgement that older people are an integral part of the church and a willingness to look again at the part they play in its life in terms of contributing to its policy and exercising their gifts.

(Hawley and Jewell)

The wisdom and spirituality - the discipleship - which older people display makes them uniquely placed to offer themselves in the spiritual service of others. Acting as mentors, prayer partners, spiritual parents or grandparents can all be contributions. These roles are often assumed unofficially but could be encouraged intentionally with training and support given to develop skills and enhance gifts. A particularly important ministry by older people to the Church is through sharing stories. Sharing stories is a means of capitalising on the experiences of older members to benefit others. As James Woodward comments: older people “can give cultural and social meaning to younger generations. They are guardians and transmitters of truth and purpose.”

Difficult situations in the church could intentionally be explored through sharing different generations’ perspectives, and through exploring the possibility of living with tension and paradox, which some older people may have come to understand and accept.

In intergenerational communities, children and teens of all ages learn from each other and from adults; adults learn from teens and children. Blessed with a sense of mutuality, everyone benefits from each other; they grow each other up into Christ.

(Holly Catterton Allen, in Shaped, Keeley)

Supernumerary ministers can face a lack of opportunities to consider the implications of ‘sitting down’ for their ongoing vocation as ministers. They may not find space to think anew about their ministry and how they would like to use their gifts in a new stage of their ministry where they no longer have to carry out the regular activities of a circuit minister.

In relation to circuits, there may be a temptation to use supernumeraries to 'fill the gaps' and fail to think creatively about how they might be able to take on projects and develop new forms of ministry.

Discussion point: What does this mean for the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church?

Creating space for working age adults within the church

Working age adults can often find themselves excluded from elements of church life due to the requirements of their job. For example, meetings that are held during working hours, perhaps because that time is most convenient for the majority, mean those with full-time jobs are not able to attend. Children and younger adults in full-time education can also be excluded. A consequence can be that the same people continue in the same roles. As well as working-age and younger adults feeling excluded, this can also lead older people to feel 'used' by the church.

Sometimes, churches fail to respond to the differing situations of those in work. For example, many people in term-time only jobs are not able to take annual leave, so are automatically excluded from church meetings and events that take place during weekdays in term time. This can include some of the most important events in the life of the Connexion. Though moving the times and dates of events may not always be practical, there are other steps that could be taken to allow those who are unable to attend to contribute and have their voices heard. Similarly, for those who work shifts, some have the flexibility to swap their shifts to fit around church life, but others do not. This means they will only be able to fully participate in church life if the church is willing to be flexible.

4 Equality Impact Assessments

The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment at: [Equality Impact Assessment \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/equality-impact-assessment)

This is a way of reviewing the things we do now and those we plan to do in the future. This process helps ensure that our practices are fair and inclusive, and that no individual or group of people is inadvertently disadvantaged. This enables us to anticipate and remove or reduce any negative impact.

The assessment requires us to consider how people of different ages are affected by what we do. We also need to consult and get feedback from those impacted.

This process helps us consider whether what we do is accessible to people of different age groups. When we complete it, we shouldn't just consider the people who attend church services and events. We also need to consider those who don't attend. Jesus did not invite people to attend temple but met them where they were. Rather than just accepting that those in the fourth age may not be able to attend, we can consider how to make things more accessible and meet their needs. The same applies to those in the 'missing generations'.

Closing worship

Acts 2:14-24

Prayer

Lord of the years,
help us to recognise and respond to your love in every season
of our life:

the spring of childhood,
the summer of youth and young adulthood,
the autumn of maturity,
and the winter of our age.

We rejoice in your grace sufficient for each day.

We praise you for the past and trust you for the future.

Amen.

(David Reddish)

God it was who said to Abraham

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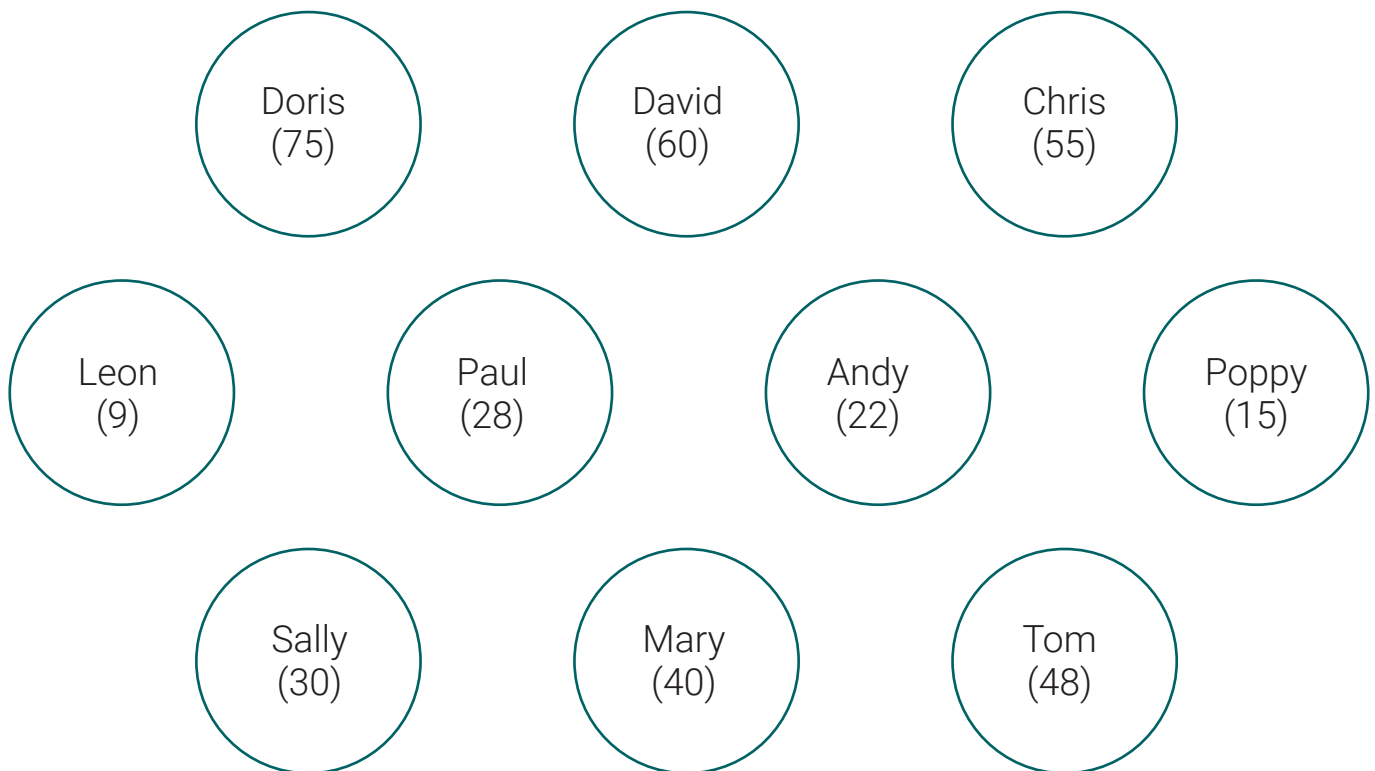
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Appendix 1 - Activity, Guess who? (Age game)



1. Has worked as a computer programmer (one person)
 2. Has never been online (one person)
 3. Can't remember a time before the internet (five people)
 4. Is always being asked to organise the PowerPoint slides in church (one person)
 5. Is an experienced research scientist (one person)
 6. Has osteoporosis (one person)
 7. Struggles with PowerPoint (one person)
 8. Has memory loss problems (one person)
 9. Is a highly-experienced project manager (two people)
 10. Never gets asked to do anything technological in church (three people)
 11. Often feels treated like a child (four people)
 12. Feels a strong calling to youth work (three people)
 13. Is in a band (four people)
 14. Is a grandparent (one person)
 15. Has won an international award for work on climate justice (one person)
 16. Is a primary carer for a disabled parent (one person)
 17. Feels a strong calling to be a Local Preacher (one person)
-

Appendix 2 – Activity answers

Andy (22)

Andy can't remember a time before the internet and is very familiar with 21st-century technology. The stewards asked Andy to help with the technology in church, to which he reluctantly agreed. Andy is more of an outdoors person and struggles with PowerPoint, which he considers to be a 20th-century technology. He doesn't speak up about his feelings on the matter. This is partly out of politeness, but also because he feels he is still treated as a child. Almost everyone at church remembers him as a baby.

Chris (55)

Chris trained as a sound engineer but is now a project manager for a small manufacturing business. She has been highly successful in that role for 20 years. A highly-organised person, she likes to keep up to date with technology, maintains a blog and designs her company's website. Despite this, she never gets asked to manage the IT in church. Chris feels that some of the older members of the church – her parents' generation – still treat her like a child.

David (60)

David is an architect by profession. Retired in his 40s due to a site accident, he is an artist and musician. He feels the IT revolution is irrelevant to him and he lets everyone know it. He's never asked to do anything technological for the church. As a musician who plays regularly in a band, David feels he is very much suited to working with young people.

Doris (75)

Doris studied mathematics at university in the 1960s and worked for a computer technology developer as a computer programmer in the 1980s. She has kept up to date with technology since then. Despite this experience, she is never asked to do anything technological in church. She often feels that she is treated as a child by church members.

Leon (9)

Leon is already a very talented drummer and regularly plays as part of a band in his school, as well as being part of his church's worship group. He was recently given a Diana Award in recognition of a project he set up, with the help of his teachers, that tackles food waste and encourages recycling in his local community.

Mary (40)

Mary is a busy woman but has no paid employment due to very significant caring commitments. She has three children, aged between 17 and 22, and her eldest daughter has recently had a baby. In the last few months, Mary's caring responsibilities have become less time consuming and she has joined a band – something she previously did when she was a student. Mary is a qualified youth worker, but doesn't talk much about her education and very few people ask. She'd love to be involved in youth work again, even in a voluntary capacity.

Appendix 2 – Activity answers – Continued

Paul (28)

Paul works for a large construction company as a project manager. He is highly successful in this role, even though he has problems with memory loss because of an illness he had as a teenager. He can't remember a time before the internet, which he jokes about sometimes. Paul is meticulous with written work and his record keeping helps him to deliver first-class projects.

Poppy (15)

Poppy has grown up in a Christian household and, inspired by her late mum, would like to be a Local Preacher as soon as she is able. Since her mum passed away, she has taken on the responsibility of being the primary carer for her dad who has Multiple Sclerosis.

Sally (30)

Sally is a research scientist for a multinational company. She studied chemistry and became a researcher in pharmacology. Although the internet emerged in her lifetime, she has used it so much as a study and research aid that she can't remember a time before it. Sally has very little interest in working with children or young people but is always being asked to get involved in church youth work. She feels it is because she looks younger than she is and often feels treated like a child.

Tom (48)

Tom loves music and still performs with a band on the local folk circuit. He's a fully qualified sports coach and rugby referee, but has recently decided to change careers after being diagnosed with osteoporosis. Tom hadn't realised that it could affect men, let alone someone of his age. However, he is otherwise fit and wants to use his coaching skills to get involved in church youth work.

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