The early years of human life are marked by a succession of moves from one place of belonging to another. From Playgroup to Nursery, Nursery to Infant School and on to Juniors, Secondary School and maybe Sixth Form College. If a child plays sport or is involved in uniformed organisations or musical activities there are similar transitions through the age-groups. And each of these transitions is marked in some way as a rite of passage, often within a family and sometimes more publicly as well. As a child I remember the ceremonies in Church associated with Promotion Sunday as we left behind one group and began life in another, in a different room and at a different time.

But once we leave behind the milestones of our younger years, and pass those of young adulthood, middle age and advancing years, they become barely acknowledged and rarely celebrated, except for the birthdays with a ‘0’ at the end and, eventually, retirement. And the milestones of later years – a bus pass, free TV licence or moving into a Care Home – are more often seen as reasons for commiseration, not celebration. The more milestones you pass, the harder the journey can become, and in a society dominated by a culture of ‘staying young’, ageist attitudes and stereotypes can turn milestones into millstones.
Methodist Homes Sunday has a new date this year – **Sunday 8th June** – and our theme ties in with MHA’s 65th birthday celebrations. Sixty five years is a traditional milestone along the journey of ageing – a time to retire and put your feet up – though be assured, MHA has no intention of doing that! We are working with more older people than ever before, and increasingly that work is designed to help older people find meaning and purpose in their later years – so that milestones do not become millstones!

There can be few people who have a life-long ambition to live in a Care Home, so for most of our residents and tenants we can only offer a second-best solution to their needs. But we do aim to be the best second-best we can be, and to pay particular attention to addressing people’s spiritual needs.

So on this Methodist Homes Sunday, we are asking again for your generous support. We invite you to remember the work of MHA, and in your worship to look beneath the headlines, re-examine the millstones and celebrate the milestones of ageing. These worship materials illustrate ways of building a service around our theme. The material can also be used in a midweek meeting or housegroup. If you want an electronic copy of these materials, they can be downloaded from our website at www.mha.org.uk. You will also find some further illustrative material there as well. We hope you will want to join with us on this, our special Sunday.
About us

MHA exists to improve the quality of life for older people inspired by Christian concern.

We began in 1943, a group of Methodists inspired to improve the lives of isolated older people. From the beginning MHA’s services have been open to any older person in need, regardless of faith.

In 2008 MHA now has more than 150 projects throughout Britain, offering residential, nursing, dementia care, sheltered housing or housing with care, day care and community schemes.

Our aim is to provide the full range of support relevant to the needs of older people, from companionship to intensive 24 hour nursing care. We have a philosophy of care that appreciates and values each person as an individual, and as a Christian organisation we recognise the spiritual needs of all those involved in our work.

Why we need your help

MHA is a charity, and any surplus funds are ploughed back into extending our services. Charitable gifts also help us to provide extra resources that make a difference to the lives of the 12,500 older people for whom we are privileged to care. Your generous support can help us to reach out to many more.
We see 65 as a milestone in our development, not a millstone, and look forward to the challenges ahead. Society has changed dramatically since 1943 but our mission is still as relevant today.

In response to today’s needs we are:

• Building new projects whilst redeveloping or extending some of our older homes and schemes
• Expanding our chaplaincy support
• Encouraging older people to live life to the full through our ‘Seize the Day’ opportunity
• Supporting end of life care with our Final Lap training
• Developing further personalised activities and interests
• Extending therapy services such as aromatherapy and massage.

Methodist Homes Sunday is an opportunity for:

• **Celebration** – of the work of MHA and the value of older people
• **Awareness** – of future needs and ways to respond
• **Fundraising** – to make a difference to the quality of life for older people
• **Volunteers** – working together
• **Recognition** – of “The Church in Action” for older people.
The Lectionary Readings (10th Sunday in Ordinary - Year A) relate well to our theme.

**Genesis 12: 1-9.** The call of Abram, at the age of 75, marks an unexpected milestone in his life and in the life of the whole community of faith.

**Romans 4: 13-25.** Paul makes use of the Abraham story and highlights further milestones. However he also alludes to some of the millstones of ageing – particularly in the face of the need for an heir.

**Psalm 33.** The psalmist reflects on humanity’s developing relationship with God and finds reasons for praise and thanksgiving along the way.

**Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26.** This is the least applicable of the lectionary readings, but it reminds us that the invitation to discipleship is an invitation to begin a journey.

The following passages also merit consideration.

**Genesis 28: 10-22.** Jacob’s stone becomes a milestone on his pilgrimage of faith.

**Job 16:18 – 17:8.** Job speaks of “the road from which there is no return.” We only have one go at this life, and the milestones that mark the journey only point forwards.

**Luke 17:2.** This is the most famous occurrence of the word ‘millstone’ in the Bible. Its context has nothing to do with ageing, and it carries a one-sided view of a millstone – a dead weight. But for the miller, they do have other uses!
Other Resources

For All Age Worship, *The Original Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams is helpful, particularly the passage which speaks about the value of experience and age.

**Holy Ground** by Neil Paynter & Helen Boothroyd (Wild Goose Publications, 2005) includes some helpful liturgical resources on ageing (pages 147ff). In particular, Tom Gordon’s piece ‘The Photo Album of my Life’ is worth a look.

**The Saints of God** by John Bell (He was in the World, Wild Goose Publications, 1995, p46ff) is a helpful meditation focussing on different stages of human life.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon’s books of liturgies, published by SPCK, contain some helpful pieces to mark milestones in life which can be adapted in a variety of ways. **Liturgies for the Journey of Life** is perhaps the most closely linked to our theme.

**Dandelions and Thistles** (Wild Goose Publications, 1999) includes a meditation by Kate McIlhagga entitled ‘Remember the Rock from which you were hewn’ which could be used to emphasise the link between milestones and millstones.

**The Green Heart of the Snowdrop** (Wild Goose Publications, 2004) is by the same author and has many short pieces, particularly in the final section ‘In the ebb and flow’ which could easily be used.

Some other resources, including pictures to add to PowerPoint presentations for use in worship will be available through our website. Visit [www.mha.org.uk](http://www.mha.org.uk)
All Age Worship

Timelines:

• Preparation before worship:
  Use half or quarter width wall paper and stretch along a wall of the church.
  Ask some people, e.g. children/house group/women’s group to mark on the line some milestones for the church, paralleled with personal local/national/international events. Then look at the line during worship and ask “Where do we appear?” Add a few births of young, middle and old (ask for volunteers). Add MHA. Use as basis for prayers – give thanks for what is past, rejoice in the present and find hope for the future.

• Produce, or better still ask others beforehand to bring, items that symbolise different times of life, (e.g. baby clothes or rattle, toys, school books past and present, driving licence, marriage certificate, pension book etc). Ask what each symbolises. Again gather in prayer.

• Use historical items to show time line... e.g. Victorian implements, gas mask, clothes, and photos of transport or families.
With each of these leave the items for people to have a closer look after the worship. Try to draw out:

- thankfulness for good things in past and present.
- thanksgiving for milestones of each of our lives - (ask for suggestions).
- God’s care through the church and each of us, including care we give as a church through MHA.

We are all used to travelling in cars or public transport. We look for signposts to tell us which way to go. (Ask about latest technology - AA/RAC websites or SatNavs.)

When most travel was on foot or horseback and the roads were tracks, milestones encouraged travellers that they were still on the right path, at a time when setting out on a journey was a perilous task. The stones were marked with the number of miles still to travel and those already covered.

God’s people used to build memorials/milestones to mark special places on their pilgrimage. In Gen 28: 18-19 Jacob raised a stone and renamed the place Bethel, i.e. House of God. And in 1 Sam 7, Ebenezer is “the stone of help”, set up by Samuel after the defeat of the Philistines.

We are each on a life journey and have our own milestones. We can be thankful that we have been shown that God is with us - that we are “on the right track”.

Visuals: Maps, SatNav, compass etc.

The section “What is real…” speaks about the value of experience and age… the milestones that have made you what you are.

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt." "Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?" "It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

**Millstones:**

Millstones are often viewed negatively. Thus “a millstone round your neck” means a problem or responsibility that you have all the time and which prevents you from doing what you want. E.g. “I'd rather not be in debt – I don't want that millstone around my neck.” And Jesus warns that those who put stumbling blocks in front of children will regret it –
“it would have been better if they had fastened millstones to themselves and jumped into the sea.” (Matthew 18: 6)

Yet for centuries millstones were the main means of grinding grain into flour and enabling people to make bread, the staple food of many civilisations. To work efficiently the surfaces had to be “dressed” so that there was enough friction to grind the grain, but in time the friction caused overheating, which damaged the flour, and excessive wearing of the stones.

When their working life is over some millstones are recycled as garden ornaments or plant holders, although it was once thought that broken millstones were a sign of bad luck or evil. Until the 1700's millers did not have cranes in a mill to move and lift the millstones for dressing. So people lifted and flipped them with large wedges. If dropped, they would end up in the mill's basement taking out everything in its path. So for a long time millstones that hurt or killed any one were considered unlucky or evil, like a wild animal in a cage once having tasted human blood, it would attack someone at the next opportunity. So perfectly good millstones were retired out of the mill and became tombstones to mark the graves of the last person they killed. They also became door steps so others would step on them and carry their evil away with them. So for a long time a millstone removed from a mill meant that it was evil or had killed someone. The worn out or broken ones would end up in new bridge abutments or be used to rebuild mill dams.
Ask if anyone knows what a millstone is/what was it used for.

What connotations do they have? (Usually negative.)

Suggest that millstones are far from negative images and have been valuable tools to create flour to make bread—something that most people eat each day. Another word sometimes used negatively is friction, and in the above we see that this is necessary to enable a successful grinding process.

Negative images are all around us—and on Methodist Homes Sunday perhaps we need to be reminded that young does not necessarily equate with what is best or old with something that is out of date or fit for throwing away. Millstones have a long life, but sometimes the function changes (see above).

Other areas that may link:

- The productive power of working together like finely honed millstones which can so easily become destructive because of too much friction.
- Millstones can still be useful when their original purpose is past.
- We can so easily misuse what is around us so that gifts become burdens that weigh us down.
Prayer

God of the past, we offer our praise for your constant love and guidance throughout our lives.

God of the here and now, we rejoice that you continue to be with us each moment of every day.

God of tomorrow, we trust in your promises as we continue our journeys as individuals and as your church.

We thank you that wherever we are, whatever we are doing, in joy and sorrow, in health and sickness, in hope and despair, you are with us. We have felt your presence as we have travelled to this day, you have marked out the way ahead and you call us to follow.

Forgive us when we are hesitant or choose to go our own way, when we find it easier to be selfish rather than loving.

Forgive us when we set up our own markers on an easier pathway, ignoring the needs of others.

Forgive us when our actions act as millstones round the necks of others, dragging them down rather than inspiring them with your love.

We ask that each day you will remake us in your image, and give us the courage to walk in your footsteps.

We pray in the name of Jesus who is the way, the truth and life. Amen.
Hymns and Songs

Brother, sister, let me serve you (BPW 473, RS 474)
Deep in the shadows of the past (HP 447)
God it was who said to Abraham (One is the Body, Wild Goose)
How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord (BPW 380, RS 589)
Jesus calls us o’er the tumult (HP 141)
Lord for the years (BPW 535, RS 603)
Lord of our growing years (BPW 514)
One more step along the world I go (HP 746)
Pausing, we contemplate our journey (MW 106)
Saviour, blessed Saviour (HP 274)
The God of Abraham praise (HP 452)
The kingdom of God (HP 139)
This, this is the God we adore (HP 277)
Through all the changing scenes of life (HP 73)
Thy hand O God has guided (HP 784)

BPW - Baptist Praise & Worship
HP - Hymns & Psalms
MW - More than Words,
    published by Kevin Mayhew
RS - Rejoice & Sing
Gracious God of All Creation,
faithful to us in the past;
you are constant in the present,
we affirm your love will last.
So we celebrate this moment,
giving thanks for thought and care
that you offer through each other,
giving us your love to share.
You were there at our beginning
watching every human birth;
walking with us through our childhood,
with us still upon this earth.
You have shared our joy and sorrow,
holding us in hope or pain,
seeing growth in age and wisdom,
understanding loss and gain.
People see us, sometimes wonder,
do not always gauge our worth,
but you value all our living,
God of human life and birth.
So we offer our thanksgiving,
sing your praise for all that's past.
You through grace and faith have held us,
and will take us home at last.

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Metre 8.7.8.7D. – Suggested tune: Abbot’s Leigh (HP 774)
Abraham is called to travel into the unknown (Genesis 12) but note that his journey is marked by stages (v6, 8-9), and on it he is accompanied by family (v4-5) and by God. Our theme offers an opportunity to reflect on each of those three facets of the journey of ageing. What are the milestones that mark the stages of later life? Some naturally lend themselves to celebrations, (e.g. retirement, becoming a great grandparent) while others do not. How might such stages of our ageing be appropriately marked?

Our society is increasingly a four or even five generation one, with many in the middle being retired but still having responsibility for aged parents. What support do we as a Church give to this group of people in our midst? How might we better accompany them on their journey?

The Psalmist wonders how God can be praised in an alien land (Psalm 137) but the people of Israel came to know that God is always with them. Ageing can feel like entering a hostile land - particularly in a society dominated by a culture of ‘staying young’. In the Old Testament period, old age is often equated with blessing, but this is less true later on. How can we help the older people in our community - and those who support them - to discern and discover God’s presence in times of frailty, loneliness and loss?

Look at recent editions of MHA’s magazine Heart and Soul for examples of how we try to mark milestones and meet the spiritual needs as well as the physical needs of older people.
When Paul reflects on the story of Abraham (Romans 4:19ff) he reflects on the ways in which two of the millstones of ageing do not get in the way of the purposes of God. Common parlance tends to stress the negative associations of millstones and ignore some of the benefits. Just as you cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs, you cannot have bread without the action of the millstone!

Millstones bear the marks of the work that they have done, and can be redressed for further work. And a common sight nowadays is to see retired millstones put to new uses in flower borders, walls and water features.

So, how in our worshipping community can we honour the millstones of ageing – both the stories that they bear witness to and the new possibilities that later years can open up? For instance, one of MHA’s former residents who died last year aged 110, never had a passport before she reached 100 – but those last 10 years of her life saw her visit many places for the first time.
As MHA celebrates 65 years of work, we can draw a timeline charting the development of the work, noting the milestones along the way as well as the scars of the journey. The same can be done through the Bible, taking us from Abram’s call through to the time when Paul writes to the Roman Church. And for any Christian community, our story will be a combination of milestones and millstones. The Church is around 2,000 years old – reflect on your part in God’s mission within your community as an ‘aged’ Church.

We are in the Pentecost season, a time of telling stories of what God has done and a time of dreaming dreams. The pieces suggested in Other Resources, by Tom Gordon and John Bell, are helpful ways of encouraging people to see the gifts of different age groups and to recognise the unseen pages of older people’s lives. How can we help our community to see those unseen pages of our Church’s life and so engage with us in a new way?
Prayers

Call to Worship
We stand on holy ground for the Lord is in this place. We come to celebrate the milestones of our lives and to recognise the millstones that prevent us from moving on. Let us worship God and offer all for transformation by his grace.

Prayer of Adoration
God of past and present and future, God of eternity,
We praise you for always guiding, healing and caring for your people.
When the people of Israel were in exile and persecuted, when they disobeyed or disowned you, you never turned away. You restored them to life and made a new covenant with them. Their millstone of shame becoming the milestone of a new future.
In the fullness of time you sent your Son to live among us. And when he was rejected and nailed to the cross, even then your love was not defeated. The millstone of death and loss becoming the milestone for our salvation.
You sent your Spirit, the bringer of hope and comfort, and who enables us to recognise that Jesus is Lord. The one who continually inspires us to lift the millstones of
despair and recognise the milestones of our journey with Christ.
In faith we worship and adore you, ever living, ever loving, ever faithful God. Amen

As we journey
As we make our journey through life,
O God help us to learn:
from the trust and dependence of babies,
from the enthusiasm of children,
from the probing of young people,
from the experience of those in middle age,
and from the wisdom of the old.

As we meet new challenges,
O God help us to learn:
from those who have gone before us,
from those we knew and those who are just names,
from the highs and lows of our stories,
and from each milestone in our lives.

As we meet obstacles in our journey,
O God help us to learn:
from the diversity of human experience,
from insights from our encounters with you,
from the way that you call us on,
and from the balancing calm of your love.

We ask this in the name of him who teaches us the love we need to learn, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
Prayers of confession

God, when we forget that life is about change, or when we try to hold on to times that are past. Forgive us.

When we forget to let go of hurts or grudges that become stumbling blocks for ourselves or others. Forgive us.

When we forget to love each other as people made in your image and make excuses to justify what we do. Forgive us.

When we misuse the gifts you have given us, and forget to value the excitement of youth, the experience of middle years and the gentle pace of older age. Forgive us.

God forgive us and give us grace to trust in you and to learn from our past mistakes. Encourage us and lead us onward as we offer ourselves for you and for each other, in the name of Jesus. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for those who are carrying the millstone of misery and who feel God has deserted them...

Pray for those who are grieving and those who are lonely...
Pray for those who are ill or who are suffering dis-ease...
Pray for those who are desperate and for those without hope...

God is with us; God is always with us.
Let us pray for those who are carrying the millstone of despair and who feel God has deserted them...
Pray for those who are frightened or who worry for others, and those who must keep terrible secrets...
Pray for those who cannot find the release of tears and for those who do not know the joy of laughter...
Pray for parents separated from their children and for children who do not know they are loved...

God is with us; God is always with us.
Let us pray for those who are carrying the millstone of hopelessness and who feel God has deserted them...
Pray for those trapped by catastrophe or war, and for those who face torment and indignity...
Pray for those who dare not sleep because the dark contains terrors they dare not name...
Pray for those who are growing older and who fear the future...

God is with us; God is always with us.
Let us pray that in their suffering they will find God waiting for them that he might lift the weight of their pain and lead them to the springs of love and hope.
As we offer our prayers for others we also pray for ourselves, as we name and face the loads that we carry.
To us God says:
God is with us; God is always with us.
Let us pray for those who do not recognise the milestones in their lives, who cannot celebrate their achievements. Help us to rejoice and to be glad as milestones become visible, and to offer them as marker posts for the journeys of others.

God is with us, God is always with us.

God is with us, and hears our prayer. Thanks be to God. Amen

A Prayer for MHA

God of love and hope, of encouragement and challenge, we pray:
for the work of MHA, for those who live in our Homes, Schemes and Communities, for those who care for them, for those whose vision and research enable new ways of caring, for those in the organisation who direct and manage, for those who support this work with prayer and by raising funds.

We acknowledge our need of one another and ask for your gifts of wisdom and understanding that the love of Christ may be shown in all we do.

Amen.