

NO ONE CAME!

One of the saddest experiences that I have had in my 35 years of ordained ministry was in 1991 being called to a cremation chapel to preside over a service for an elderly lady. When I arrived at the chapel, I found that besides the funeral directors I was the only one there! What particularly saddened me was after the ceremony the funeral director candidly said to me; *“we would do at least 3 of these funerals each month where nobody but ourselves are present.”*

For the first time in our national history there are now more Australians who are over 65 years of age (15%) and older than there are teenagers (13%). An ageing and increased life expectancy has brought with it a variety of problems they include chronic loneliness, mental health issues and long-term material poverty. Also, on average women are experiencing the reality that their spouse is dying 3 years earlier than they are. My own mother has been a widow for 27 years, and amidst her friends this is not unusual.

We, as a society, especially our churches, need to be more aware than ever of the challenges elderly people are facing and definitely place more resources towards their wellbeing.

Saint James in his New Testament letter *nails* this reality so well in these words; *“that pure unspoilt religion in the eyes of God is in coming to the aid of widows and orphans.”* (Chapter 1 verse 27) *Fr Martin R Maunsell*