A comprehensive guide to later life

By looking up the references to a random cross-section of subjects, including vitamin D deficiency, macular disease, Parkinson’s, universal credit and Lars Tornström, the proponent of gerotranscendence, I was not disappointed. As my wife and I have recently struggled to remake our wills and set up powers of attorney, I can especially commend the clear advice the author gives on these matters.

Shoard addresses in a through-going and balanced manner the biggest concerns and decisions people face as they grow older. Where shall we live? How shall I manage financially? How will I be cared for when the need arises? What about end-of-life issues? The plethora of information and guidance offered is unequalled in any other publication I know. The detail is impressive, extending to the availability of all manner of gadgetry and equipment and the valuable contribution that personal contribution that personal computers and smartphones can make to an older person’s well-being.

As someone who has been involved in researching and working over the years, I find the author’s chapter on this subject particularly impressive. Its 25 pages are essential reading not just for individuals and families for whom these devices are the first thing they live with, but also for churches seeking to respond to the challenge of becoming more dementia-aware and dementia-friendly, as demonstrated by the example of St Stephen’s church in Chatham which a case study found on page 237.

In a book produced for the general public one cannot expect too much emphasis upon specifically Christian matters. However, the valuable contribution of faith groups is recognised and the broad spiritual needs of older people in regard to being loved and valued, feeling secure and finding ongoing purpose in life are affirmed throughout.

As I see it, the one draw-back of such a book is that inevitably the information, including the different benefits, social care and NHS provision, will change as times passes, sometimes quite rapidly. I have no doubt that this book is prefaced with a publisher’s note advising readers that its contents are not a substitute for expert and up-to-date advice that readers should seek from qualified professional sources. As and when publishing becomes more digitised than it is at present, updating should become easier to make, as I doubt whether Marion Shoard would want to face writing yet another book in a scale in a few years’ time.

For those who are interested, details of the immense research involved in writing this book are given in the Notes section at the end of the book where there is an appendix of “useful contacts”.

Mainstream

As it stands, this book will be of great value to middle-aged and elderly individuals as well as to family carers of older relatives. As a great reference book it should be found in every public library. And since the age profile in mainstream churches, not least Methodist churches, is much higher than in the community at large, ministers’ staff meetings, circuit resource centres (where they exist) and local church book-stalls would be well advised to possess a copy. It may cost almost £23, but at 2p a page it is well worth it. Don’t be put off by its length and detail; it is not just toilsome to read, but it is also the words of Ann Widdecombe who commands.

Now I must get on and read at greater depth those many pages that I have needed to skim over in preparing this review!

The Rev Dr Albert Jewell is a supernumerary minister in the Leeds South West and City circuit and a former pastoral director of MHA.

When hip-hop moves in

JOSPEH George, aka Joey G, has converted a dissertation on this, as well as on the of-"pert Kayne West. So lots of as-pects of secular rap and hip-hop have encouraged crime, violence and misogyny.

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Joseph George, though, is to be praised for a valuable contribution.

Tony Jasper is Jesus Music and Be-"yond columnist for the Methodist Recorder.

The ‘beauty and passion’ of historic churches

THE National Churches Trust (The NCT), doing so much to look after and champi-oning churches and chapels in the UK. Matthew Byrne’s English Parishes Churchs and Chapels: Architecture, Art and People (National Churches Trust, £15) is a coffee-table style book that shows the case for the trust in England where it has worked to save churches of the majority of those illustrated.

There are 26 churches featured starting with the Anglican Saxon church of St John, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, through the Norman and Mediaeval period up to the modern day. It does not include the Roman Catholic church of St Mary, Leyland, Lancashire. It is a beautiful book with some stunning photo-graphs of churches. Two that stand out are St Mary and All Saints, Princes Risborough, Bucks, which sits as the River Nene Bows past and St Thomas Becket, that stands all alone on Rom-ney Marsh. There is also pl-enty of photographs of the de-tails inside such churches such as corbelled vaults in panels at St Nonna, Alumunum, in Cornwall, the wonderful in-terior and painted ceiling of the Baroque-style St Michael and all the Angels, Great Whit ley, Worcestershire, and the Victorian-era vaulted nave of the red-brickled St Agnes, Sefton Park, Liverpool.

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