

RYEDALE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL DAY CONFERENCE

'Who Cares?'

On Saturday 16th April 2016, The Ryedale Christian Council in North Yorkshire organised a Day Conference, at Ampleforth Abbey, on Christian Care in the Community. 75 people attended and the main speaker was Bishop James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle and lead Bishop on Healthcare matters for the Church of England.

Bishop James gave us an inspiring talk on the subject of exactly what CARE is, who are the people needing it and who are the best people to give it. He said that whereas care is often recognised as helping those who cannot manage for themselves, it is more than that - caring should be as important as breathing. Why is it the core of the Church's mission? To help us grow in maturity and to prepare us in life for death - dying well includes living well in the hope of resurrection; care is not only for the weak, God needs to be recognised in the whole of life.

Who cares? God, Ministers in the Church and all Christians. How do they care? The example of Jesus as a Good Shepherd is a pattern for us all. The clergy can offer care as Chaplains, or with Healing Spiritual care and with Pastoral visiting by showing empathy (or tenderness) and attentive listening. The laity can be trained in Pastoral teams, and also as Parish Nurses - a new development. All Christians can offer a listening ear, neighbourliness, volunteer work in homes and in healthcare - and we must never forget the unsung heroes who care for relatives in their own homes and need support themselves.

Why care? We are called by God to care for others - there is a theological foundation for this both in the Bible and within the central Christian truths. The whole earth is our hospital for as we care we ourselves are formed. Christian Pastoral Care is distinguished by having the mind of Christ and is formed by what we believe. Attentive listening is the most valuable gift we can give to others.

The rest of the day was spent in different workshops run by four specialists from the caring community. Each person was able to attend all four workshops.

WORKSHOP ONE: was run by Rev. Dr Jonathan Singh, Clinical Manager of the Sunflower Centre at St Leonard's Hospice York and Rev. David Williamson, Spiritual Care Leader at the same Hospice. They spoke of end of life care. Dying is a process through life but is a taboo subject. Knowing ourselves helps us to help others. We learnt that Hospices offer healing to mind, body and spirit. Spiritual care is not necessarily religious care, so can be offered to everyone. At death the spiritual help is often more important than help with the bodily needs. Support is also given to all staff and volunteers in the Hospice. An important tip is persuading the carer to go at the pace desired by the dying person rather than that of the carer. In life our work is one of our important issues, in death family becomes the most important thing. At this workshop we were told how important having a death plan really is: where we'd like to die, who we want to look after us and who is the person we want to be with or speak to before death. It is important to make a plan and have it ready (including a "do not resuscitate order"). There are TED short films on youtube that can help.

WORKSHOP TWO: was run by Dr Nick Land a Psychiatrist and Medical Director of Tees, Esk & Wear NHS Foundation Trust. Dr Land tackled the problem of how mental health fits into the Christian world. Are those with mental health issues

welcomed into parish life? He said as Christians it's vital we know about mental health as it is widespread and is much misunderstood. In people with anxieties or depression negative false thinking builds up and it is important that these people are not abandoned. They need love and support and the encouragement to seek help. People often remain within their pain and need to be gently lifted out of it. Belonging to a church can be a positive thing for them providing they are welcomed and not thought of as "odd". We must LISTEN and not judge people. Sometimes depression is the result of poor spiritual care causing guilt feelings or a feeling of hopelessness. Christianity can offer forgiveness, hope and love but depression makes it hard for people to believe this. We don't need to be experts to help - a friendly phone call may be the first approach. Dr Land told us of a mental health access pack available from the website: www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org.

WORKSHOP THREE: this was all about Dementia. Rev. Dr Pat Malham, Methodist Minister for 8 rural Yorkshire churches and formerly a Psychiatrist gave us a lively, loving and informative presentation which was of enormous help in understanding people with Dementia. Dementia can often look like depression. 1/3 of the population suffer from it. It causes people to live on the edge, there are no signposts in their life. Many suffer acute fear and this can change their personality. "*I can't do things in Church anymore so I can't go*" is something many people say so they lose the support of their community and become isolated. They feel if they cannot contribute they are no use. But God is still in their being, Pat Malham said. In them there is a person of great worth. How then can churches welcome these people, make them feel safe and cater for their needs? How can we accompany them? Things to remember:

1. Look at them as a person.
2. Do not panic.
3. Relax.
4. Take your time.
5. Start with something familiar to them.
6. Don't worry if the conversation is repetitive.

What worship can the churches offer to people with Dementia? It needs to be relative, simple (but NOT simplistic - they are not children) and have Holy Symbols and Holy Words, and do not deny them the sacraments. In Care Homes people with severe Dementia are often said to be "gone" - they are not - always believe they are still there.

WORKSHOP FOUR: was about Stress. Dr Susi Strang Wood, Psychotherapist, Theologian and retired Doctor told us the symptoms of stress and how impossible it is to help others while stressed oneself. She helps many people, including stressed clergy, to practice mindfulness in order to relieve stress. It is important that, while still caring, we are able to leave behind the burden of others in order to be able to give pastoral support where it is needed. We cannot be accepting, forgiving, and compassionate to others if we are wrapped up in our own stress. When stressed we cannot switch off our pain and are therefore not able to focus on those needing our love, but we can hand our own worries over to God. We have four bodies, spiritual, mental, emotional and physical and all need care. Susi taught us to relax physically and let our mind concentrate on the "now" so that all tenseness disappears. This method can be used in prayer as well, using the '*still small voice of calm*'.

There followed a General Forum together with the Bishop and workshop Leaders where questions were taken, followed by a short Act of Worship. Everyone found the day extremely helpful and went home determined to be better pastoral carers.