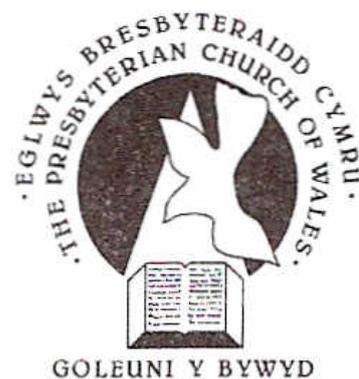


“GO IN CHRIST’S NAME!”

**A resource pack for elders and pastoral
visiting teams**



Foreword

Go in Christ's Name is a wonderful resource that will enable local church leaders to minister more effectively as individuals and as a group. It also raises pertinent discussion questions. I am confident that its use will enhance the pastoral care in any church, and encourage more Christ-like leadership.

Produced by those who understand Welsh church life, and filmed against some beautiful local scenery, ***Go in Christ's Name*** deserves to be included in the training programme of every Presbytery and local church.

Rev Iain B Hodgins

Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Wales

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Introduction

In Spring 2010, a small group of elders and pastoral visitors at Tyddyn Street Church, Mold invited me to conduct a series of training workshops on pastoral care. At that time, the only DVD and discussion material in my possession was that used by the Church of Scotland – “Caring for God’s People”. It soon became clear that the Welsh context was very different and new material filmed in a local context was required.

I had worked with Focus 7 Ltd, an independent film company specialising in educational and charity films, on several occasions in the past. Sean Atkinson, the director of Focus 7, was sympathetic to our Christian aims and so Focus 7 was the natural choice to provide new film material as the basis for a six-session pastoral care programme. But before filming began, Sean and I realised that we needed to start with a blank slate, discarding all the Church of Scotland Board of Parish Education material in favour of more up-to-date and interview-based film. In short, we wanted the elders and ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Wales to do all the talking, and to share their experiences of pastoral care, good and bad.

Filming took place over a brief and hectic period in the summer of 2010. As anyone who has ever worked in films knows, that is only the beginning of a lengthy process of picture and sound editing. We had hours of material to sift through, filmed largely in Northern Presbytery where I currently work as Development Officer. The themes may have remained roughly similar to those of “Caring for God’s People”, but with some new and important differences. A new session on “Models of Pastoral Care” was used in place of the Church of Scotland video “Getting over the doorstep” – perhaps people are more friendly in Wales and do not have any difficulty getting into the homes of our church members!

Along the way, we had several surprises and some very moving statements from carers and visitors. For the film on “Visiting the seriously ill” we were fortunate in having Gary Windon to share his experiences as a hospice chaplain; that particular film could not have been made without the co-operation of management and staff of Nightingale House Hospice, Wrexham. Other highlights (for me) included our visit to a Home Group in Llandudno, and an interview in Prestatyn with a lady whose husband had died after suffering from dementia.

Elwyn Richards, Director of Training, provided the funding and (more importantly) endless enthusiasm and encouragement. His introductory and concluding remarks were shot in a single day at Coleg Gwyn – all unscripted. To help us focus on asking the right questions, Neil Kirkham stepped in to provide invaluable guidance as well as contributing some of the questions on the DVD and background notes in this booklet. This has been a team effort.

This resource is offered, humbly, to the church as a resource tool for those engaged in pastoral care. The discussion pack and the DVDs can be used without any “expert” help: as the films prove time and time again, it is *your* gifts and insights as elders and ministers that matter! This is your story; let us hope in study groups and elders’ meetings throughout Wales and beyond, it is a story that will run and run, equipping the church for its mission in the next decade. So – Go in Christ’s name!

Mike Ward, June 2011

1. THE CHALLENGE TO CARE

In the DVD elders share some of the difficulties they have encountered in visiting. You may want to write down some of the difficulties you have faced – and fears before you even set out on a visit – and then reflect on how you have dealt with these.

Ruth talks about the difficulties she encountered, as a new elder, in getting to see a church member. Sometimes even getting over the doorstep can be a challenge! To counter this, we heard from Angela of a strategy she used – taking plants or baking to someone – to “break the ice”. Below are some key points to remember that might help you making that first contact.

- Smile and ask “May I come in?”
- Remember not to arrive in the middle of a TV programme or when children are getting ready for bed.
- If the time is inconvenient make an appointment to call again.
- Phone prior to your visit, particularly for those living alone who may be uneasy about opening the door, or for busy people who are seldom at home.
- Persevere on the doorstep, listening and getting to know one another.
- Offer practical help.
- Remember a chat in the supermarket queue or at the post office can help to build relationships with those whom we visit.
- A visit at times of celebration or in times of difficulty can help.
- Pray for an opportunity.

In the next DVD, we will look at *organisational responses* to care – in other words, systems of care that a church can put in place that can help provide pastoral care. But the important thing to remember is that, as an elder or pastoral visitor, *you* have a role to play in the church’s work. It cannot, and should not, be left to the minister! Elders and visitors provide

- Continuity of care: an elder or visitor may have lived in the area much longer than the minister, and know the area and the people much better.
- Special gifts and skills: these have been recognised by the church when you were called to be an elder or invited to be part of a visiting team. Others may be much more aware of these gifts than you are!

- Day-to-day visiting: yes, people enjoy a visit from “their minister”, but as pastorates become larger and demands on the (fewer) remaining ministers increase, the day-to-day visits become important for visitor and visited alike. It may seem routine to you, but to someone who is housebound or in special need, your visit is a blessing.

Questions for discussion

What is the purpose of pastoral care? Is it just to help people through crises?

What is the role of the minister, the elders and the members, in this?

How many ‘...one another’ commands can you recall from Scripture? (e.g. *encourage one another*).

Is every elder called to visit?

What qualities would you look for in an elder?

How do you make sure nobody slips through the net?

In what situations would you visit? (Good or bad)

Further reading

There are a huge number of introductions to pastoral care. Some of the best of these are listed below.

An introduction to Pastoral Care
 Introduction to Pastoral Care
 Pastoral Care for Lay People
 Pastoral Care: An essential guide
 Handbook of Pastoral Studies
 When I needed a neighbour
 Growing a caring church
 Tend my flock
 A primer in Pastoral Care
 Pastoral Care & Counselling
 That they may have life

Charles V Gerkin
 William V Arnold
 Frank Wright
 John Patton
 Wesley Carr
 Penny Nairne
 Wendy Billington
 Kate Litchfield
 Jeanne Stevenson
 William C Kay / Paul C Weaver
 Theodor Bovet

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

Luke 4: 14-21

John 13: 34-35

John 21: 15-19

1 Corinthians 13: 1-7

Philippians 4: 4-7

1 Peter 5: 1-7

Bible references (“...one another”)

Be devoted to one another (Roms 12v10a)

Honour one another (Roms 12v10b)

Live in harmony with o.a. (Roms 12v16)

Accept o.a. (Roms 15v7)

Express equal concern for o.a. (1Cor 12v25)

Serve o.a. in love (Gal 5v13)

Carry o.a.'s. burdens (Gal 6v2)

Be kind and compassionate to o.a., forgiving o.a. (Eph 4v32)

Speak to o.a. with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5v19)

Submit to o.a. (Eph 5v21)

Look to the interests of o.a. (Phil 2v4)

Bear with o.a. (Col 3v13a)

Forgive whatever grievances you may have against o.a. (Col 3v13b)

Counsel o.a. (Col 3v16)

May the Lord make your love increase & overflow for o.a. (1Thess 3v12)

Encourage o.a. (1Thess 4v18) (Hebs 10v25)

Spur o.a. on to love & good deeds (Heb 10v24)

Encourage o.a. daily (Heb 3v13)

Do not slander o.a. (James 4v11)

Confess your sins to o.a. (James 5v16a)

Pray for o.a. (James 5v16b)

Love o.a. deeply (1 Peter 4v8)

Offer hospitality to o.a. (1 Peter 4v9)

Have humility towards o.a. (1 Peter 5v5)

Love o.a. (1 John 3v11)

Your notes

2. MODELS OF PASTORAL CARE

In the first DVD, we examined the difficulties that visitors may encounter, and their fears, when visiting church members. But we concluded that this was a task for the whole church, with elders and visitors bringing an important dimension to the pastoral care of the church.

Here, we look at some of the reasons why people leave the church and how the church could respond to lapsed members. We then look at two systems or organisational responses to pastoral care in use in Wales today – home groups and the 'book system'.

There are many reasons why people leave the church; in the film, elders suggest just a few of the reasons why people drift away. Some of these are listed below:

- A personal crisis may lead to a loss of faith
- People may feel unwanted although we try to be friendly
- Priorities may change and so the church no longer has the place it once had
- The church can be boring
- Inspiration may be lacking
- We let people down e.g. in bereavement or in a dispute
- People become "burnt out"
- Faith has become a very private thing
- People are shy of institutions
- People don't put roots down as they once did
- Leisure patterns have changed

When encountering someone who has drifted away from your church, then

- Take time to reflect on our own faith journey - we may have lapsed without leaving the pew!
- Think of the welcome The Father gave to the Prodigal Son
- Assure the person they have been missed
- Listen to any grievance and apologise where necessary
- Supply any factual information

- Be aware of changes in the person's attitude or changes in the church
- Could they meet a need in the church?
- Would a yearly "keeping in touch" visit be more useful?
- Remember them in your prayers
- Don't be judgmental
- Don't feel you have failed if they do not return the next Sunday!
- Remember they may be feeling guilty or embarrassed.

Of course, as Neil and Mike, two of the ministers in this film point out, people have "free will". Indeed, Mike argues that sometimes the church's role should be to focus on the warm 'barbecue coals' at the centre of church life – an analogy you may want to discuss further.

It is gratifying that people *do* return to church when circumstances change, as Margaret explains in the film. Do not forget there are sometimes excellent opportunities within the church calendar to create a welcoming atmosphere and encourage people to go back to church, notably of course "Back to Church Sunday" in September, for which excellent materials are available. Perhaps your church can take part in this?

A team approach

The "book system" is a good example of a team approach to pastoral care. It is a tried and tested model of providing pastoral care that does not overburden visitors but shares the responsibility of visiting whilst ensuring those in need are visited regularly.

The "home group" model takes pastoral care a step further, with a small group taking responsibility for its members. It is easier to share your concerns with a small church "family", where individuals are less likely to feel lost or forgotten. Small is beautiful!

A needs approach

The film just gives two examples of pastoral care models. One size does not fit all! Other churches may find other models more appropriate to their community and situation. Some of these newer approaches to care are highlighted here:

1. Rather than visiting in a geographical area, for example one street, an elder might have a specific remit for the care of a number of young families, for those recently married, for the housebound, for those in hospital
2. A Youth Elder might meet a group of youngsters on a regular basis and keep in touch by text messaging or email.

3. Pastoral care groups of elders and others who visit the housebound, the bereaved, baptismal families, single parents and organise social and other events for that group.
4. Elders who liaise with local social work and health centres to identify needs that the church has the resources to meet.
5. Groups who work in chaplaincy in schools or hospices.
6. Keeping in touch with busy people and those working away from the parish by email or phone.
7. Offering prayer for those in need by dedicated prayer groups or services of prayer and healing.

Whatever model – or models – you adopt, *please note the need to comply with the Data Protection Act when keeping records.*

Questions for discussion

Lapsed members

Where in your list of priorities would you place ‘recovering the backslider’?

Is there a danger of pandering to people to keep them coming?

Does the church need people or do people need the church? Explain.

Models of care

Which model applies to your church? Is there a better model?

How do you ensure that people ‘do not slip through the net’?

Should all elders be required to visit or only those with a specific gift for the work?

What are the benefits/dangers of Home Groups?

Who cares for those not in groups?

Further reading

See also the introductory texts For “The Challenge to Care”.

Making Small Groups Work	Dr Henry Cloud / Dr John Townsend
Small Group Starter Kit (Lifebuilder)	Jeff Arnold
Building A Church of Small Groups	Bill Donahue / Russ Robinson
House Groups: the Leaders’ Survival Guide	Ian Coffey / Stephen Gaukroger
Small Group Leader	John Mallison
The Sheep That Got Away (Why people leave church)	Michael J Fanstone

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

Matthew 13: 1-23

Luke 15: 1-32

John 3: 1-21

Your notes

3. VISITING THE SERIOUSLY ILL

In the DVD a number of points were made about visiting anybody who is seriously ill and some points which are particularly relevant when visiting someone in a hospital, hospice or care home. These points can be summarised as:

- Sometimes we are faced with situations which we want to fix, but can't.
- Difficult and awkward questions do not have to be answered, but they do need to be explored.
- Explore people's stories to help them make sense of their lives.
- Be careful of leading a conversation somewhere a person does not want to go.
- We are the gift of Christ to the people we visit, convey the Christian hope to them without preaching!
- Concerns over what to say and how to act are common, be comfortable with silence and just being with someone.
- Touch is very important to many people but unless you know the other person well, be careful about touching them, especially if there is any risk of you infecting them in their weakened state.
- When visiting an institution, introduce yourself to staff and make yourself known. Learn what the routine of the institution is and try to avoid busy times. Mornings are usually the busiest time in any institution.
- Learn to handle interruptions, some procedures and drug regimes are very time critical. Either wait somewhere out of the way, or arrange to come back another time.
- If you cannot get to see someone, leave a message.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication and cues that someone may be tired or in need of a rest.
- Confidentiality is paramount. Don't reveal anything to people in general unless you have permission.

An important point to remember when visiting anyone who knows that they are approaching the end of their life is that they may be dealing with many conflicting and contradictory thoughts and emotions for which there may be no 'answer' as such. At this stage of life, we are offering a ministry of support, comfort, presence, reassurance, but rarely answers. Often questions are asked rhetorically, without any expectation of a clear answer, only the opportunity to explore the question. Take this example: if asked 'is there life after death?' there can be only two answers: yes and no. This gives you a 50% chance of giving the wrong answer for that person in their quest. If you demand that the only answer is 'yes' when the person asking is traumatised by the idea of having to continue existing in any form intolerable, then 'yes' is the wrong answer. Many times, questions like this are not requiring a narrow answer, but a broadening conversation. Try not to narrow a conversation with closed answers, but encourage exploration by asking open questions. Unless you have a very good relationship with the person asking the question, be very wary of the answers you give and remember that knowing someone for a long time does not necessarily mean that you know them well, only that you have known them for a long time.

Questions for discussion

How would you handle a situation where the person you are visiting expresses a belief that seems to contradict what you think is orthodox Christian belief?

What would you say when faced with a well known member of the congregation who specifically asked that you ensure they are not placed on the prayer list at church?

Given the comment by a person you are visiting that you are welcome to call again, but under no circumstances should the minister visit, how would you respond?

Further Reading

There is a huge range of material available on the subject, but amongst the more stimulating are:

Mark Cobb, (2005) *The Hospital Chaplain's Handbook*, SCM (Norwich).

Tom Gordon, (2007) *A Need for Living*, Wild Goose Publications (Glasgow).

Michael Kearney (1997) *Mortally Wounded: Stories of Soul Pain, Death and Healing*, Touchstone (New York).

Peter Speck, (1988) *Being There: Pastoral Care in Time of Illness*, SPCK (London).

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

Isaiah 43:1-4

Psalm 121

Psalm 139

2 Corinthians 1: 3-7

John 14: 1-4

1 Peter 5: 6-11

James 5:13-18

Your notes

4. CARING FOR THE BEREAVED

“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing...There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what everyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be around me. I dread the moments when the house is empty.”

So begins C S Lewis in his own personal account of grief and loss after the death of his wife Joy, in *A Grief Observed*. Grief and loss is a private world, yet it is one which sooner or later all church visitors have to enter when they visit someone recently bereaved. There is a wider task too which is reflected in the title of this film: not *visiting* the bereaved, but *caring for* the bereaved – a task that goes beyond visiting the house to caring in its widest sense.

It is tempting to refer to textbooks on bereavement to help us in our task. But, as Gary Windon said when discussing our care for the seriously ill, “people are individuals – they do not behave like textbooks!” It is interesting to note that there is much less emphasis now on “stage models” of grief such as the classic model set down by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, and more emphasis on the process of grief, something much more individual and fluid than was previously supposed by health professionals in the past.

*“Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.
He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest, my noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.
The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the woods;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.”*

Auden’s famous poem reminds us that when someone dies, it is as if the lights go out. Jenny Garrard echoes the experience of many bereaved people in her interview with Elwyn in the

film. She, like others who have emerged from the end of the dark tunnel of grief, has worked through what are called four tasks of mourning.

1. *We accept the reality of loss.* The funeral is a big turning-point. It gives the bereaved person a sense of closure, and also a new status. But in our head we may acknowledge what is happening; in our heart we may feel it is still a bad dream.
2. *We feel the pain of loss.* This usually starts after the funeral. After some weeks of concentrated family caring, support from family members can diminish. People go back to their own homes. Others expect us to be “getting over it”, yet grieving takes much longer than people realise – two years is an average.
3. *We adjust to life in practical ways.* This can start almost immediately after the death. There is a need to learn to do the tasks usually done by the deceased.
4. *We adjust to life emotionally.* This is generally the hardest task of mourning. We may display feelings of guilt or disloyalty when we find ourselves enjoying something or laughing for the first time.

Remember as a visitor we can encounter surprising and strong emotions when visiting someone who is bereaved. Among feelings which might well be shared are

- anger: at themselves, doctors or nurses, the deceased, or God
- fear: for the future, about their security, about their own health
- guilt: as experienced by Jenny, or perhaps for a bad relationship
- self pity: why me?
- depression: no point to life, a longing for their own death
- searching: for the deceased in a crowded street or familiar places
- denial: refusal to accept the death, especially where the body was unrecovered

We may even be told of more unusual experiences:

- seeing/hearing/sensing the deceased (a third of those who have lost someone close are said to experience one of these)
- vivid dreams and nightmares usually about the deceased.

Caring for the bereaved does not stop with the end of the visit, as Neil explains in the film. We must keep the bereaved in our prayers, and be prepared to listen to all members of the family, especially the needs of children or any learning disabled person. (The needs of the learning

disabled and their experiences of grief have often been neglected.) Remember too that anniversaries and “family occasions” in the life of the church, such as Mothering Sunday or Christmas can be especially painful, as Jenny pointed out in the film. A phone call, card or a visit at such times can be a great help. What may seem like us to be small things – the first time back to church for the bereaved person – can be huge hurdles.

Special forms of bereavement

In a short film, there is not space to look at some of the more difficult types of bereavement we may encounter – suicide or sudden death, or the death of a child. It is essential we remember where our gifts lie – and where they do not, and thus when we need to call on specialist services. Much damage can be caused by well-meaning words (“It was God’s will”) in circumstances when the death has been particularly distressing such as the death of a baby or a pre-natal death.

Finally, do not forget other forms of grief that are less public (and can be therefore just as difficult) than the death of a loved human companion or family member. The death of a pet can trigger strong feelings of grief and bereavement as we mourn a family companion who may have been a central part of our life for ten or more years. “Never mind, you can get another one!” may be easy for us to say after a church member’s dog or cat has died – but would you say that about a close human friend? And yet these intense feelings of bereavement, which can be made worse by the lack of a Christian animal funeral, often go unnoticed in the church community. There is no column in the newspaper to announce the death of a beloved pet. This is a new area of pastoral care, and one that is becoming increasingly well-researched thanks to the pioneering work of Andrew Linzey and others in creating liturgies of animal care and funeral liturgies to mark the death of a beloved *animal* family member.

Questions for discussion

How does your church care for bereaved members?

How could this be improved?

If “we grieve, but not as those without hope”, what hope do we offer?

In what ways does it help/hinder if you yourself have been through grief?

How do you deal with the death of a child or suicide?

What advice would you give to a family with a learning disabled family member about whether that person should or should not go to the funeral?

Would it help to establish a regular small group for people who have been bereaved?

Further reading

Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: *J William Worden: Routledge*

This is a standard text for those dealing with bereaved people. Although written mainly for health professionals, it is written in a plain and informative style with plenty of case studies.

A Grief Observed: *C S Lewis: Faber & Faber*

This is a personal record of the author's feelings on the death of his wife. It is written from a Christian perspective and honestly faces the issues of pain and suffering. It is useful for grieving people who have difficulty expressing and understanding their pain

Bereavement - A Shared Experience: *Helen Alexander: Lion: www.lion-publishing.co.uk*

This book is suitable for those experiencing bereavement and those seeking to support them. It contains personal stories of a wide range of bereavements from a Christian perspective – very readable

Understanding Bereavement: *Mind Publications: www.mind.org.uk*

This helpful booklet, from the mental health charity, sets out clearly the experience of bereavement. It encourages those who have been bereaved to seek out help and commends them to spiritual resources as well.

Letting Go: *Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck: SPCK*

This book is written mainly for chaplains but is useful to a wider readership

A Special Scar: *Alison Wertheimer: Routledge*

This book deals with suicide and the effects it has on the survivors. There is a lot of case study material which explores the topic in a thoughtful, practical and compassionate way.

Surviving the Death of a Child: *John Munday: D.L.T.*

A teenager is murdered; the murderer is not found. This book describes how a Christian mother comes to terms with her personal tragedy.

Living When A Loved One Has Died: *Earl Grollman: Souvenir Press*

A thoughtful and encouraging book for the bereaved.

Living Through Grief: *Harold Bauman: Lion Booklet*

This booklet deals with the feelings experienced by many in bereavement, from a Christian standpoint

All in the End is Harvest: ed *Agnes Whittaker; DLT/Cruse*

This anthology of prose and poetry has provided comfort to many.

Losing a Child: *Elaine Storkey: Lion Booklet*

In this short booklet the effects of the loss of a child are sensitively explored from a Christian perspective.

When Your Child Loses a Loved One: *Theresa Huntly: Augsburg*

A booklet containing helpful guidance for parents.

Children and Bereavement: *Wendy Duffy: Church House Publishing: www.chpublishing.co.uk*

Useful reading for parents, teachers and others involved in helping a child or teenager come to terms with a death. Helpful appendices are included with readings and prayers, support organisations and books and resources.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies; *Doris Stickney: Mowbray*

This simple illustrated booklet explains death to children and gives guidance to parents as well as prayers for both children and parents.

Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care: *Andrew Linzey: SCM Press.*

Useful reading both as an introduction of the importance of celebrating our animals and an anthology of prayers, readings and litanies for animals. It also contains a liturgy for animal burial, and memorial prayers for animals, all written from a Christian perspective.

Understanding Death and Dying: *Francis Cathcart: Working Together Publications.*

Three short booklets for the learning disabled, their families and carers on death and dying written specifically for the learning disabled.

Bereavement and people with a learning disability: *Sue Read, EMAP Publications.*

Sue Read is a health professional specialising in learning disability, and this is an excellent introduction to a specialised field of pastoral care with particular emphasis on bereavement.

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

Psalm 23

Romans 8: 35-39

Revelation 21: 1-4

John 11: 17-37

1 Corinthians 15: 51-57

John 14: 1-3

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Your notes

5. CARING FOR THE CONFUSED ELDERLY

Experts predict that 1.7 million Britons will suffer from dementia by 2051. In short, dementia will affect the lives of 1 in 3 of us, either as carer or sufferer. Two generations ago, this was a relatively small area of pastoral care in the life of the church: after all, fewer people lived long enough to develop dementia, and those who did were cared for in institutions and hospitals. The various “community care” initiatives of the last three decades and the closure of mental health centres and hospitals have resulted in more and more dementia sufferers being looked after by their local communities or in family settings. However, the greatest single factor in the increase of the profile of dementia sufferers has been increased age expectancy.

Dementia is a progressive decline in mental function due to disease or damage to the brain. Although its precise causes are still unclear, it is manifest in its effect on memory, language, problem solving and attention span.

In the film, carers and elders recount some of the changes that dementia can bring in the lives of those affected.

- the loss of short term memory and difficulty with names - even of close family
- physical e.g. incontinence in the later stages
- behavioural e.g. swearing, wandering at night
- spiritual e.g. fear, isolation from God, loss of faith memories

It is important that the church acts as a link between the confused person and the church family, and to share reminiscences of the church and keep faith meaningful. Caring for a confused elderly person can be a great strain on the carer emotionally, spiritually and physically, and the church can and should be available to help share that burden and give respite, even for half an hour, to the carer.

The home visit

There are several key points to remember:

- Identify yourself - your name and where you are from
- Sit on the same level - preferably with the light on your face
- Remember body language - it is believed the confused can be very sensitive to this
- Use what is familiar - the Lord’s Prayer, favourite bible passages or old church or family photos.
- Use short and simple sentences - they are easy to follow, humour is not easily understood

- Use names - I, they, she, him, it, can be difficult to follow
- Be aware of background environment - a TV can make concentration difficult
- Avoid asking questions - these can create real anxieties
- Use music if possible – even singing a well-known hymn or song together can help. Research suggests that music is a powerful therapeutic tool in slowing the progress of dementia.

Conducting worship in a care setting

One practical way that a church can help is to conduct a short act of worship in a care or residential setting – even in the person’s own home with one or two family members or friends present. Clearly, planning is important – and expect the unexpected! Do not be embarrassed at interruptions or challenging behaviour. Others have experienced the same thing, so do not take it personally.

Neil and Elaine offer several suggestions to help your planning, which can be summed up as follows:

- Use ritual e.g. communion
- Use symbols e.g. a cross
- Choose familiar hymns and short Bible readings
- Choose relevant themes
- A sermon isn’t necessary
- Sit beside the participants
- Give help to look up hymns
- Keep it short - 30 min maximum

Questions for discussion

Suggestion for a group activity:

Plan a service in a Care Home taking into consideration the content, length and practical details. Remember that some of the residents may be confused.

What qualities would you look for in a Care Home?

What would you consider ‘abuse’ of a resident? How would you recognise and tackle it?

Of what value is your visit to staff at the Home and relatives of the residents?

Further reading

Pastoral Care of Older Adults	Harold G Koenig / Andrew J Weaver
Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill	J A Davis
Pastoral Care of People with Mental Health Problems	Marion L S Carson
Strangers in the Pews	Roger Grainger
Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch	John Bayley

(Iris Murdoch, philosopher and author, developed Alzheimer's late in life: this is a personal and moving account written from the carer's point of view.)

It can also be useful for a small group to watch on a DVD the following:

Waiting for the Telegram (BBC with Thora Hird) Alan Bennett

(A fictional account of an elderly confused person written by one of the great observers of human life, Alan Bennett. Elsewhere, Bennett has written movingly of his mother's own slow degeneration into dementia in a care home in A Life Like Other People's. The 30-minute film, Waiting for the Telegram, and short readings from A Life Like Other People's would make an excellent study evening for your church group.)

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

Numbers 6: 22-27

Psalm 88

John 15: 1-17

Romans 12: 9-21

Ephesians 3: 14-21

Jude: 24-25

Your notes

6. LET'S PRAY

In the making of this series, the editing process was made somewhat easier by the relative consensus from those we interviewed on each of the themes: the same difficulties and anxieties emerged throughout. Yet when we asked elders if they found praying in someone's home difficult, there was no such consensus! Some did not see this as a problem at all; others admitted to finding it profoundly difficult. So in this final film, we examine the "language of the church": that which sets us apart, and sets you apart as a church elder or visitor, from any number of agency visitors, health or care professionals or others who are engaged in visiting – namely, Christian prayer.

Prayer is a gift from God. It can be a valuable part of pastoral visiting, and not just in the visit itself.

- Regular praying for the people we visit is vitally important. No matter how busy our lives, there should always be time for prayer.
- We can pray before we visit.
- We can pray with those whom we visit – note, this is prayer *with* and not prayer *for*. Visiting and pastoral care blesses visitor and visited alike; part of that shared fellowship and blessing is expressed in prayer.

Various opportunities may present themselves as we care for our people:

- Times of crisis can be times when prayer is appreciated
- Times of celebration can be opportunities for prayer as well
- The housebound may appreciate prayer
- If someone says, "You will remember me" that too may be an opportunity to share a prayer with them.

Of course not everybody is comfortable with spoken prayer. A few guidelines can help:

- Remember we are children coming before a loving heavenly Father
- Ask first if a prayer would be helpful
- Use people's names
- Make any request simple
- Remember thanksgiving.

Neil, in the film, reminds us of the ACTS model of prayer – Adoration, Confession, thanksgiving and Supplication. This can provide a useful template for which to build a prayer. There are alternatives to spoken prayer however. We can

- Leave a prayer card
- Say “I will remember you in my prayers”
- Suggest that the prayer group might pray for them - confidentiality is important
- Share in silent prayer.

For those who want to construct written prayers, there are numerous anthologies and compilations of prayers for a variety of settings and situations. So go in confidence, and pray in God’s name!

Questions for discussion

What do you find most difficult in praying for someone at home or in hospital?

Discuss the ACTS model of prayer. How might you apply it in a private situation?

How good a listener are you? Can you pick up people’s hopes and fears in conversation and pray about them?

Helpful hint: If you don’t know what to pray e.g. in the case of someone terminally ill, remember that Jesus asked the blind man, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ You can ask, ‘What do you want God to do for you?’

Further reading

Moments of Prayer: prayer and pastoral visiting
Pray without ceasing
Pastoral Prayers for the Hospital Visit

David Scott
Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger
Sarah Phillips

Bible passages for Study and Reflection

1 Chronicles 29: 10-13

Psalm 100

Luke 11: 1-13

John 17: 6-26

Romans 12: 1-8

Philippians 4: 4-7

Your notes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Film credits

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Filmed by Focus 7 Ltd in HD format on location in Wales.

With thanks to the ministers and elders of Northern Presbytery, and to the staff and management of Nightingale House Hospice for their co-operation in the making of these films.

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Ordering information

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