

Care Matters

The Newsletter of the Social Care Commission of the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh

Beatitudes for the Aged

*Blessed are they who understand
My faltering steps and palsied hand.
Blessed are they who know my ears today
Must strain to catch the things they say.
Blessed are they who seem to know
My eyes are dim and my wits are slow.
Blessed are they who look away
When coffee was spilt on the table today.
Blessed are they with a cheery smile
Who stop to chat for a little while?
Blessed are they who never say
You've told that story twice today.
Blessed are they who know the way
To bring back memories of yesterday.
Blessed are they who make it know
I'm loved, respected and not alone.
Blessed are they who ease the days
On my journey home in loving ways.*



Older People in the Christmas Story

Most of us think that Christmas is for children, and we forget how many older people are essential to the Christmas story.

Firstly we have the parents of John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus. Imagine what a shock it was for Zechariah and Elizabeth who were well past the age for children suddenly discovering that their prayers were answered and they were having a son! While they would have been delighted, they would also have worried if they had the energy to cope with a youngster. *Today we remember the many grandparents who have to look after grandchildren, and we pray for them.*

We think of Joseph, traditionally portrayed as an older man, with a new young wife who is pregnant

with a child who is not his child. *We pray for all those who welcome other people's children into their families.*

We think of the Wise Men, who made a difficult and dangerous journey to find the Christ Child. *We pray for all who are journeying towards a God whom they do not yet know.*

Finally, we think of Simeon and Anna in the Temple, recognising God in the Child Jesus after many years of praying to see the Messiah. *We pray for all those older people whose story of faith can help and support us in times of difficulty.*

Lord help us all to welcome the Child Jesus into our hearts, so that his love may shine in us, and so that our imperfect love will blossom into his perfect love.

Lay Leadership of Funeral Rites

In November 2005 Fr (now Mgr) Michael Regan led our Bereavement Study Day on "*Preparation for Leading the Rites of Funerals by Lay People*". Over 100 people attended the day and over 2006 the information was presented in a further 5 sessions in different areas of the Archdiocese.

We have been asked to provide more input in

Whitburn in February 2010, on two evenings with dates to be finalised, and in **Galashiels on Saturday 24 April 2010** from 10.00 to 3.00 pm.

Maureen McEvoy will speak on working with bereaved families as they plan a funeral, and Patricia Carroll will prepare lay people to lead the Rites of Reception of the Body and the Committal of the Body.

If your parish/cluster/deanery would also like some input on this topic please contact the office.

Enough for All

Saturday 30 January to Sunday 7 February 2010 is Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. Contact www.actionweek.org.uk for more information and

free resources. Or contact Scottish Churches Housing Action on 0131 477 4500

The Senior Years

In October 2009 the Jesuit Community at Lauriston, Edinburgh, led a series of three afternoon meetings to explore thoughts and experience on ageing.

Fr Gerry Hughes and Br James Spence led sessions on the Spiritual, Sociological and Practical Insights of Ageing.

Almost 60 people, mainly of retirement age, attended all three sessions, and all found it very rewarding and thought provoking.

We were challenged to ask ourselves, 'Is there a retirement age for spirituality?' And if there is not, 'What is God saying to us, and what are our feelings about the many aspects of our life as we get older?'

We were encouraged to think of ourselves as chronologically gifted, which is more positive and life-giving, than always concentrating on the losses we experience in ageing.

We must, however, acknowledge our losses, which can include loss of:

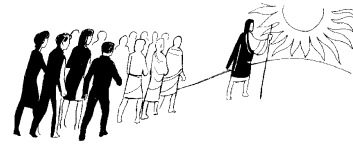
Physical energy, eyesight, hearing, mobility, mental agility, interests and enthusiasm.

We can feel discounted, discarded and fearful of what is ahead, and so we need to be kind, gentle and generous to ourselves. We need to acknowledge that God is in the facts, and so the facts must be kind. As we feel the effects of old age we are led to ask 'Where is our ultimate security?' With our faith we can answer that God is our ultimate security, but we can have doubts and these doubts can be helpful in finding a truer image of God. In prayer we learn to talk to God as a friend, and enjoy and relax in his company.

When participants were asked in the final session of the advantages of age, there were many answers:

I can be myself, and be free of peer pressure. Priorities change e.g. my appearance is less important and other interests are more meaningful. I am calmer and more aware of what is important and worry less about little things. Friends and family are more important than status.

We can often recognise that we are on a pilgrimage in life and one person added 'Luggage is for the journey; the journey is not for the luggage'.



As we grow older we often ask 'Who am I?' Fr Gerry responded 'I don't know who I am – thank God! But I am on a journey where the direction seems right'.

We find God within our own experience and many people find it helpful to write down 'How I would like God to be'. The resulting image of God is often most consoling, and helps us rid ourselves of feeling of guilt and inadequacy.

The Social Care office, together with the Jesuit Community, is hoping to build on the good things happening in some parishes. As we do so we need to remember the words of Prof Ferguson Anderson, 'Remember in dealing with the elderly all they bring is theirs, because all of us as we grow old become who we are.'

A small group will be meeting in the New Year to share ideas of how parishes can help the older members of our communities. If you would like to be involved in this group, please contact the office.

The idea which really struck me in this series of afternoons was one given by Fr Gerry: 'When we die it may be that God will ask only one question:

Did you enjoy my creation?

Caring for the Carers

Do you give up your own time to care for someone elderly, ill or disabled? If so, you are not alone. According to Carers UK there are almost 6 million carers in Britain today.

Jean French of Carers UK (www.carersuk.org or Tel 0808 808 777) advises carers to speak to everyone involved in caring for their loved one and to ask lots of questions, including how they can help you as a carer. She advises asking your local authority and asking for a Carer's Assessment. Information on this is also available on www.direct.gov.uk.

If you are caring for a partner, you may have to come to terms with changes in your lifestyle and talking together is very important, advises Fintan Nicholls of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers www.carers.org.

As a carer it's natural to put the person you care for first, but it is important not to neglect your own wellbeing. Try to make time for small but regular treats, such as a chat with a friend or a long soak

in the bath. You'll be a much better carer if you do not wear yourself out completely.

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