



# Faith in Older People

## NEWSLETTER – Issue Summer 2010



This issue sponsored by  
Claremont Trust  
SC002721

### Mission Statement

**Faith in Older People** aims to celebrate the lives of older people and to support the spiritual care of older people and their families

#### Faith in Older People

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#### Trustees:

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Geoffrey Lord  
Helen Mein  
Lissa Smith  
John Starr

Theological Advisor:  
Rev Prof John Swinton

Contact details:

**Faith in Older People**  
21a Grosvenor Crescent  
EDINBURGH EH12 5EL

Tel: **0131 346 7981**

Email:  
**info@fiop.org.uk**

Website:  
[www.faihinolderpeople.org.uk](http://www.faihinolderpeople.org.uk)

### Faith, Hope and love: being in the moment with people who have dementia.

I was recently listening to a lecture on biblical interpretation given by Professor John Goldingay, a professor of Old Testament at Fuller Seminary in the US.



Professor John Swinton

At the beginning of the lecture he gave an invitation to his students to join him and his wife for a meal the following week. His wife, who has now sadly passed away, had multiple sclerosis which was at an advanced stage at the time of the lecture. He informed the students that his wife probably wouldn't remember them or be able to communicate, but he urged them nonetheless to speak with her. He said "she probably won't remember you afterwards but in that moment she will appreciate you."

Hearing that was an epiphany. Suddenly I realised that I had forgotten something very important: the significance of the present moment. My lapse of memory echoes the general forgetfulness of society. We have forgotten what it means to value time.

One of the interesting things to note about capitalist societies is the way in which time has become a commodity. We 'buy time' 'sell time' 'waste time' etc. We live with time as if it is constantly about to run out! Time is often a deep source of frustration and angst. Rather than being friends of time, very often time becomes our enemy! But Goldingay's advice to simply be in the moment with his wife reminds us that time is meaningful and valuable. There is deep value in being with someone in the present moment, even if their recognition of your encounter is fleeting, it is not without meaning.

Within the context of severe dementia recognising the meaningfulness of time and the importance of the present moment is a gift that we easily overlook. The place where we meet the other person is in the sacred, often fleeting moment of connection between the person with dementia and those who desire to relate to her.

*(continued overleaf)*

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The touch of a hand; the brief locking of eyes, points towards the importance of being there in that moment. **There may be nothing more, but that moment is healing.**

Of course, to encounter a person with severe dementia in the immediacy of the present moment requires faith, hope and love. Faith that the person before us is more than many might assume them to be. Hope that in the Spirit, your presence can be meaningful; and love that is prepared to give the person before you the benefit of the doubt, even when all of the normal communicational cues point towards emptiness.

### **Faith inspires hope that enables love.**

Faith hope and love as they are recognised and worked out within the sacrament of the present moment means that our encounters are not dictated by the strictures of failing neurology.

Human beings are much more than their memories and anyway, who knows what is going on behind that which appears to be obvious? Don't people deserve the benefit of the doubt?

*Rev Professor John Swinton,  
Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care, University of Aberdeen*

## **A Reflection**

"Where does this journey begin and at what stage can you deny me my selfhood and my spirituality? As I lose an identity in the world around me, which is so anxious to define me by what I say or do and say rather than who I am, I can seek an identity by simply being me, a person created in the image of God. My spiritual self is reflected in the divine and given meaning as a transcendent being.

As I travel towards the dissolution of myself, my personality, my very 'essence', my relationship with God needs increasing support from you, my other in the body of Christ. Don't abandon me at any stage... sing alongside me, touch me, pray with me, reassure me of your presence... I may not be able to affirm you, to remember who you are or whether you have visited me. But you have brought Christ to me. If I enjoy your visit, why must I remember it? Why must I remember who you are? Is it to satisfy your OWN need for identity? If I forget a pleasant memory it does not mean it was not important to me!"

These are the words of Christian Bryden, an Australian with Alzheimer's who spoke at a conference in 2002

## **Let's Get Personal - Personalisation and Dementia**

Alzheimer Scotland Report

Personalisation provides choice and control to the social care user, with services that orientate around their lives; it can be considered a right of citizenship. It is not just about what services can do, but about ensuring that services work with the natural support provided by people's friends and family and with wider community resources.

However, personalisation is not widely practiced; very few people with dementia and their carers in Scotland have genuine control over the support they receive.

This report identifies the barriers that limit the wider implementation of personalisation and provides key recommendations that will enable the majority of people with dementia and their carers to personalise their care and support so that it is meaningful to their lives.

Order online via their website  
[www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org).  
Or phone on -  
**0131 243 1453**

Single copies of the report are available free to people with dementia/family carers in Scotland via the 24 hour  
**Dementia Helpline**  
**0808 808 3000**

## A CIVIC CAFÉ EVENT



This was a new venture for FiOP in partnership with the Festival of Spirituality, Edinburgh Interfaith Association and St John's Church and enabled us to begin to consider issues around spiritual care and ageing in relation to other

faiths. The style of the event provided an opportunity for different perspectives to be offered and for people to be involved in several discussions in small groups around a table and to write their thoughts on the table cloth for the next group to see.

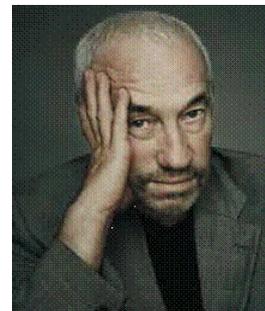
Our table hosts included representatives from the Sikh community; Care Commission; NHS Chaplaincy; City of Edinburgh; the Scottish Dementia Working Group and members from the Christian community.

The key issues which emerged included the importance of the oral tradition, of storytelling; respect for the individual and their culture and traditions. This included the value of stillness and silence and not feeling that you had to be seen to be 'doing' all the time. People with dementia still retain an emotional memory of encounters with people even if they have no conscious memory so that it is still possible to develop a relationship with them through touch, singing, smell and familiar rituals. To achieve these things care services needed to be responsive and to have a greater understanding of the role of spiritual care and different faiths.

FiOP hopes to continue to explore ageing in an interfaith context in the coming months.



## LIVING WITH DEMENTIA: MY MOTHER AND I



**9<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

10.30am – 11.45am  
at St John's, West End,  
Edinburgh  
(venue 127)

In this very special fundraiser for **Faith in Older People**, organised by the Festival of Spirituality and Peace **Simon Callow**, acclaimed actor and writer, will talk openly and honestly, about his mother's dementia and the impact it has had on his own life, with **Malcolm Goldsmith**, author of *Hearing the Voice of People with Dementia* and founder of *Faith in Older People*.

Tickets can be bought on-line through the Festival of Spirituality ([www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk](http://www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk)) or through The HUB

## The Stories of Our Elders

by Michael Williams

My dad died six years ago. I miss him, for a number of reasons, but mostly because I miss his stories. He was of that generation for whom the phrases 'The Depression' and 'The War' evoked powerful memories and stories. Even as a kid, I loved those stories, invariably begun with the words, "When I was your age . . ." or "You think it's bad now, well back in the Depression . . ." or "I'll never forget that summer in 1942."

Dad's stories of his childhood and teen years were usually funny, perhaps not what you'd expect of such a serious and challenging time; yet they reflected the resilience of his generation to deal with suffering and deprivation.

To my brothers, sister and I, Dad's stories conjured up hilarious images of him and his friends getting into trouble or inventing ways of making a few pennies. As I got older and took up the study of history and literature, I appreciated that Dad and Mom, my aunts, uncles and grandparents were a living connection to past events that I was reading about in my textbooks or watching in film documentaries at school. Yet those histories focused on leaders, generals and dictators, while my Dad's stories were about ordinary people like me.

As a storyteller, I treasure the memories and stories of our elders. They are living history. Yet it saddens me to see so many of the old folk out of sight behind nursing home walls, often forgotten by our society so enamored with youth and celebrity culture. I'm heartened every time a caring nurse or volunteer organises a storytelling event or when a school sends its pupils into a nursing home to talk with or record the life stories of its residents. We need these stories. Not only do they link us to the past, but they are good for our health and mental well-being. Research reveals

that sharing stories stimulates the brains of even senile patients, the neural pathways sparking to life with words, images, feelings and memories. And it's not only the elders who benefit. Research in America also suggests that adolescents who know the stories of their parents and grandparents are less likely to suffer from depression and other mental illness.

We need the stories of our elders.



Years ago, I remember attending a family reunion in Canada of relatives on my Dad's side. It took

place on my Dad's uncle's farm, the same farm where our great-great grandfather had settled after arriving from England in the early nineteenth century. On the table in the dining room was a large birthday cake. It was dedicated to my ancestor: he would have been 200 years old! At the time, I thought my relatives were a little strange. Today, I can appreciate their sentiment. Without him, none of us would have been there. The stories flowed that day along with the iced tea and beer: stories of farming, storms, births, deaths, accidents, friendships . . . the stories of everyday life.

Yes, I miss my Dad and those who've passed on in our family. I miss their stories. But I am grateful for my memories. They live on in the stories I tell. Our elders' stories are out there waiting to be listened to. We can't afford to waste this natural resource. Our elders are a wellspring of stories. Make the time to listen and nourish yourself and them.

**Michael Williams, Ph.D.**

Storyteller & Education Consultant  
Prestonpans, East Lothian

[iamthestoryteller@gmail.com](mailto:iamthestoryteller@gmail.com)

## Courses

In the last few months our Training Coordinator, Mary Moffett has been busy delivering courses on Death and Dying, Transition, Nature, Music, Using Memory Boxes, Visiting People at Home. FiOP has been working closely with Care Homes, and pastoral carers in different denominations and in different parts of Scotland.

Courses are offered using a participatory workshop style, aiming to share best practice and acknowledging the expertise that people bring with them.

For further information please contact FiOP at [info@fiop.org.uk](mailto:info@fiop.org.uk)

From a recent course

### **The Stories we Live By....**

we received the following feedback:

I attended a course where we heard from Rosas and Chris on making a Memory Book. At that time my husband Ron, was about to celebrate his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was also suffering from Parkinson's disease and had big communication problems. We had invited around 50 people to a party at the New Club; they had shared parts of Ron's active life. It seemed to me that Chris' idea was exactly what I needed. So I made up a book (actually a ring binder) of photos from Ron's past. Then I took this to the party.... it was wonderful. First, people who were guests were able to place themselves in Ron's past; (as a lawyer with British Gas, in local Government in Southwark, in churches, with charities. Then everyone was able to talk with Ron about the past they had shared with him and which they now saw in photograph. It was part of a wonderful and glorious occasion.

Thank you, Chris, Rosas, and Mary.

*Rev. Freda Alexander*

## A Debate

will be held on **7<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

### **'Is there a difference between spiritual care and good person-centred care?'**

#### **The Rev Malcolm Goldsmith**

founder of Faith in Older People  
will be talking with

#### **Professor Mary Marshall,**

Professor Emeritus, University of Stirling

Moderated by

#### **Professor Frank Clark, OBE**

Chair of the Care Commission

at Stockbridge House, Cheyne St,  
EDINBURGH EH4 1JB

5pm Tea Start 5.30

There is no registration fee but if you would like to attend please contact FiOP at [info@fiop.org.uk](mailto:info@fiop.org.uk)

## BOOK REVIEWS

The Quarterly magazine of the Christian Council on Ageing ([www.ccoa.org.uk](http://www.ccoa.org.uk)) has reviews on

**Making Sense of Spirituality in Nursing & Health Care Practice, an Interactive Approach** – Jessica Kingsley £16.99

**Learning to Let Go: Making the transition into residential care** by Penelope Wilcock – Lion Books £7.99

**Valuing Age – Pastoral ministry with older people** – James Woodward SPCK £12.99

## NEWSLETTER

"... let me congratulate you on a well produced (and eminently readable) newsletter. In the midst of a much needed high level review of the long term needs of older people, it is fitting that we remind the "strategists" of the aspect of "living" which your organisation is focusing on. "

*Frank Clark ... Chairman,  
Care Commission*



## **SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND WELLBEING IN LATER LIFE**

**Faith in Older People was delighted to have the opportunity to organise this conference, held in the Glasgow University Crichton Centre for Research in Health and Social Issues which brought together participants from churches, health and social care, to consider the importance of the spiritual journey for older people.**

This was presented in terms of **old age as a time for celebration**, by **Rev. Malcolm Goldsmith**, in which we approach ageing with a sense of wonder and contentment and continuing creativity so that our journey towards death is not met with fear and apprehension but rather with gratitude and a sense of mystery.

***"The problem with ageing is not age – it is petrification – a rigidity of the soul – inflexibility. It is when we close our minds to our responsibility to ourselves and to others to keep on growing", (Joan Chittister).***

Although there are some wonderful examples of the support provided to older people in congregations it was felt that this needs to develop and new ways of providing a presence found.

**Ageing as a spiritual matter** was the theme of **Dr. Harriet Mowat's** presentation. We must capture the story of individuals to reinforce that their lives have been meaningful. What will be remembered about us; who will hold our memories; do we allow time to review and reflect upon our lives and allow time for reconciliation? What is important is to live in the present and have opportunities to be creative and playful.

**Professor David Clark** gave an overview of **end of life issues** and considered the traditional approach to death as being sudden, accepted, having rituals and probably at home; contrasted with modern approach that end of life was gradual, with less ritual and death in hospital. The Post Modern approach was unpredictable, with a stronger focus on personal spirituality and a consumer choice as to where to die. There was a strong focus on the hospice movement and who should take responsibility for spiritual care at the end of life. How do we prepare staff and carers to undertake this role?

**Jenny Henderson** through practical exercises and examples illustrated the importance of being **able to communicate well with older people who had dementia**. It was through more than speech but of thinking of ways to help them express themselves and their needs through a variety of creative ways, to ensure that we adapt to their individual requirements. This required time and patience.

The presentations were followed by a lively Panel Discussion.

**"A most encouraging event,  
with some very impressive people"**  
(Conference participant)

*The conference was a collaborative event between, Faith in Older People, Glasgow University, Scottish Episcopal Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway and the Church of Scotland. We received support from St. John's Dumfries; ACTS and Glasgow University.*

## Winding down and revving up

There have never been so many able older people alive at one time before. What sort of approach to life do you need if you are going to be able to see old age as a potential time of growth, a time to look forward to with hope that contains the promise of insight and wisdom?

The popular media images of old age in our youth obsessed Western culture range from **Depressing** – it's all downhill

“Last scene of all,  
that ends this strange eventful history  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything”  
(from Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man)

through **Ageist and Alarmist** – “Old people hang on far too long – they bed block, use scarce resources - are a drain on financial resources”

(Why doesn't society stress the value of carers – who save the Scottish Government and our taxes billions a year – or acknowledge the value of loving grandparents – or all those past 65 who are good neighbours, skilled farmers and gardeners, volunteers?)

to the **slightly bitterly humorous** Victor Meldrew “grumpy old man” or the female version “I will still be me and will of course have more time to do things when I retire – mind you if my husband is about the house I am not sure I want twice the husband and half the money!”

Do other agencies offer us any hope that we should expect old age to be creative? - Well - not much!

**Medicine** is focussed on making people better, helping cure disease, but you cannot cure old age (which is very upsetting for medics!) Our dis-ease at accepting the inevitability and naturalness of death as the end point of maturity is obvious, though the hospice movement has gone a long way to tackling this.

**Psychiatry and psychotherapy** rest firmly on the foundations of child development and attachment theory and surprisingly little seems to have been done to see if there are patterns of development, of disintegration or individuation that could be expected as normal in healthy old age. And it seems that few people over 65 are routinely referred for counselling or psychotherapy with the expectation of improvement.

**Social work** – much of this runs on Systems Theory and tries to help people adapt to the dominant society – to “fit in” to the system. Most intervention is in response to a crisis and having assessed the problem a solution is suggested perhaps a mobility aid or alarm call and with such coping mechanism in place, the case is then considered complete and set aside until the next problem arises.

Of course we know that Occupational Therapists do help old people flourish and function as well as possible at home or in care.

Could it be that faith groups, who all value spiritual insights and wisdom, could be the ones who best see old age as a time for growth? After all, the spiritual quest does not stop when we retire, in fact if we are lucky it hots up!

Participating in a recent workshop with Pilgrim Care in St Andrews Rev Peter Neilson told us a wonderful story that sums up the way the Christian faith can and should affect our perspective on old age. He went to visit a parishioner who was old and dying and asked her tenderly how she was. He got the wonderful reply:

“Well, I'm winding down... but I'm revving up”.

Living to a ripe old age is a gift, and of all the lifelong learning to be done, the pursuit of wisdom through the exercise of spiritual practices is an archetypal goal. The hope of finding fulfilment, of making sense of life in the light of faith is a creative task, one well suited to old age.

*Mary Moffett*

## We celebrate ageing and faith

Developing an understanding of spiritual care of older people.

Encouraging people to celebrate growing older and

recognising and affirming their gifts and experience.

We offer support and training to pastoral carers and

ordained members on an ecumenical basis and amongst people of other faiths.

Supporting caregivers within health and long term care institutions to enhance the quality of life and wellbeing

by ensuring the inclusion of spiritual care for older people

### Faith in Older People

Director

Maureen O'Neill

Training Officer

Mary Moffett

Administrator

Jean Myers

*We are very grateful for donations from congregations. Can you help?*



## SPIRITUALITY

### HAVE YOU FOUND ANY YET?

This DVD, produced by Alzheimer's Scotland and Faith in Older People, and filmed by Artlink, aims to assist those who care for older people to understand better their spiritual needs and to find ways of enabling them to be fulfilled.

Spiritual care is not easily understood. The work undertaken by Alzheimer's Scotland in the 'Beyond Barriers' project and the Palliative Care Initiative together with that undertaken by FiOP in 'Delivering Spiritual Care' has highlighted the reservations and discomfort of some staff in discussing the issue with residents and relatives.

We hope that the DVD will help to demystify the issue and give clues to considering this important aspect of our lives. Spiritual care is made up of many factors and we have looked at the issue in terms of 'what gives meaning to people's lives'.

The conversations in the DVD open up these issues both for staff and for residents. We raise questions for discussion and provide case studies to help to strengthen our understanding of how individuals keep in touch with the things that have really mattered to them throughout their lives.

The project was funded by the Scottish Government.

Copies are available from [info@fiop.org.uk](mailto:info@fiop.org.uk) and FiOP and Alzheimer's Scotland – Beyond Barriers Project would be pleased to facilitate discussions.

#### **Our DVD has had a good response:**

*"At last a DVD that explains what spirituality really means!!!"*

*Over the years I have been met with the repeated assumption that Spirituality = Religion.*

*In some spiritual sections of care plans, you find. "Does not follow any religion" or "Doesn't attend church"*

*How valuable a resource this will be in helping staff to understand the real meaning.*

***In very many cases, staff are actually enabling spirituality but don't recognise what they are doing. Great stuff"***

*(Helen, Care Manager)*