

Christians on Ageing - Church of Scotland Guild - Faith in Older People
Harvest field – A celebration of the contribution of older people to our faith communities
Wednesday 17th November 2021

'The accompaniment of care: the potential of chaplaincy in social care services.'

This morning I want to briefly reflect on:

- The nature of social care support
- The role of spiritual care in that care and support
- And how the concept of accompaniment describes the potential for chaplaincy in social care.

Inevitably I will reflect my own Scottish context, but I trust that the message will be of relevance regardless of your location in the UK.

The nature of social care:

The last two years has seen a lot more public and media awareness of social care and its role in society, not least sadly because of the failure to protect social care services at the start of the pandemic.

But whilst there has been an increased volume of comment not all of it has been informed or indeed accurate.

Social care is both more than care homes – whether residential or nursing and it is more than simply services and supports to older people however significant those are.

My own organisation has a definition for social care and it is that social care is:

'The enabling of those who require support or care to achieve their full citizenship as independent and autonomous individuals. It involves the fostering of contribution, the achievement of potential, the nurturing of belonging to enable the individual person to flourish.' (Scottish Care 2019)

There are many points in life when we might require support – perhaps because of an accident or disability; because of age or frailty – regardless of the reason the support is not there to do for us, to remove our choice and individual control, to replace our personal agency or capacity – it is there to enable us to live and to live that life to the fullest possible extent.

Indeed, I have for some argued that there should be a human right to social care – namely that services and supports should exist and be provided by the State which would enable all citizens to play their fullest part in their communities within the boundaries of the choice they make.

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This is about independence – not a political independence – but rather enabling people to be as independent as they want for as long as they want.

Social care is about an attitude which says that every woman, man, and child has something to contribute, to give to the whole community – indeed the community has no right to call itself that – unless it makes sure that all are included, all voices heard, all folks able to contribute and to take part, all insights shared and valued.

Social care support is holistic in that it seeks to support the whole person and is about attending to the individual's wellbeing rather than simply their physiological health. It is about removing the barriers that limit and hold back and the fostering of conditions so that personhood can grow, and the individual can flourish.

Social care is not about performing certain functions and tasks alone for it is primarily about relationship; the being with another in a manner that fosters individual growth, restoration, and personal discovery. It is about enabling independence and reducing control, encouraging self-assurance, and removing restriction, maximising choice, and building community.

There is a clear distinction between addressing needs which keep you alive and healthy and those which are more holistic and relate to wellbeing. To remain in relationship, to maintain friendships and be connected to the community are as important requirements of social care support as being nourished, healthy and safe.

Social care at its best is never about a set of functions and transactions – it is not just about personal care and getting someone up in the morning, helping them to meet their basic needs of food, warmth, and shelter – those are of course important

But life is more than simply breathing; our days are more than the numbers on a calendar – life is more than existence – it is about loving and contributing, being present and belonging.

That is all the job of social care – and it is a political embarrassment that we have reduced it to a maintenance service instead of recognising its potential as a set of supports – with the person at the centre and in control– which allows an individual to live their life to the fullest until the last moments of breath are taken.

Now if that is what social care is – then the role of spiritual care in that is one of fundamental importance. To offer a holistic approach to social and health care we have to attend to the whole person not just what which we see, can take a pulse for or can fill a form around.

It was the World Health Organisation as long ago as 1948 that underlined the central importance of spiritual care:

They said:

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“Health is not just the absence of disease, it is a state of physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing” (World Health Organisation, *Precis of discussion*, 1948).

The NHS Scotland publication *‘Spiritual Care Matters’* (2010) describes spiritual care as a key element in a care and support offer which enables the individual person to flourish:

“A person’s spirituality is not separate from the body, the mind or material reality, for it is their inner life. It is the practice of loving kindness, empathy and tolerance in daily life. It is a feeling of solidarity with our fellow humans while helping to alleviate their suffering. It brings a sense of peace, harmony and conviviality with all. It is the essence and significance behind all moral values and virtues such as benevolence, compassion, honesty, sympathy, respect, forgiveness, integrity, loving kindness towards strangers and respect for nature.”

The role of spiritual care in social care

I would argue that to achieve the holistic care and support which social care delivers that spiritual care should be a key component of the day-to-day delivery of social care, from the point of assessment through to service delivery.

To address the individuality of the person in receipt of social care support and to deliver services in a person-centred way there is a requirement to address the individual needs and values of the individual. Spiritual care is part of that process.

To care and to support another involves staff and carer being equipped to attend to the spiritual needs of those who are supported to the same degree and extent that an individual is equipped and skilled to meet physical or mental health needs.

To achieve a human-rights based, person-centred approach to social care, spiritual care requires to be supported and resourced at various points in the individual care pathway.

Why have I mentioned accompaniment?

Well, I have sought to argue that first social care is more than just a number of tasks to keep you alive, but that it has to attend to the whole person in order for them to flourish. I have gone on to say that spiritual care is an intrinsic part of that social care. The how is more complicated – but it is in this space where I think accompaniment comes in.

If you look up a dictionary, you’ll get quite a few definitions for accompaniment.

The most common is either in music that an accompaniment is an instrumental or vocal part designed to support or complement a melody.

Then we have its use in food as an item that goes with something else,

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Both carry with them connotations of backing, support and to complement.

But there is another meaning, less often used, though undoubtedly probably the most ancient of the ways in which the concept of accompaniment has been

That is the notion of accompaniment as the offering of support and presence to someone through difficult life moments, stages, or transitions.

Accompaniment can also therefore mean 'the act of accompanying someone or something in order to protect them.'

Now I do not mean an armed escort or personal protection – but I do mean something which has a more physical and tactile connotation than a musical or food accompaniment.

The word accompaniment has at its root the word '**companion**' as meaning someone who accompanies another – it's from the Latin word *compāniō, *compāniōn- which in turn when you examine it someone who 'breaks bread with you.' from the Latin com-, *com-* + Latin pānis, *bread*.

Now I know you can make language mean and do anything – but there is a long spiritual tradition of acknowledging that someone who walks with you, who breaks bread with you (that most natural and yet most intimate sharing of our vulnerability and need) – is someone who accompanies you.

You might indeed be very familiar with the traditions of spiritual direction and accompaniment where a mentor or teacher walks with another on their spiritual journey through life, instructing by example, leading by walking in front, reassuring by presence.

To accompany another is to be in solidarity with, to walk with, to share life.

Accompaniment is focused on nurturing interpersonal relationships.

I can think of no better description for the potential for chaplaincy in the lives of those who access social care services and supports. Again this is not a transactional relationship; it is not doing for but being with; walking alongside in the paths of life perhaps especially as those paths narrow with then passing years.

When I think of social care staff working in a care home or in the community – they seek to foster a relationship by which and through which they become part of the family and the community of compassion around the person being supported.

It is this relationship that gives a dynamic of accompanying to the act of care.

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So, I really do think there is a potential for those of faith and none, those who care about spirituality to consider the role of accompanying those who use social care support.

In Scotland plans are afoot to develop a National Care Service. Several of us have argued that a core part of the Standards and characteristics of that Service is the role of spiritual care as part of the fulfilment of a holistic approach to social care.

That means that I think Government and providers need to resource the work of spiritual care in direct social care delivery. It means that staff need to be trained and confident, competent, and comfortable in undertaking the social care and support of another and in recognising that spiritual care is a core component of that care.

This will not be easy, and I believe that it will require the skills of those such as chaplaincy in communities to enable this element of care to be delivered. In times past this might have fallen to formal religious bodies but in these days, I think this needs to be recognised as a distinctive task, a definite responsibility and a necessary requirement.

There has been a long history of spiritual care being central to the delivery of NHS services across Scotland. I believe that the establishment of a new National Care Service requires a similar commitment to and emphasis upon those who receive social care supports, wherever those services are delivered.

Accompaniment is how we can spiritually support others, especially those who are struggling. It requires that we are genuinely present with them, listening to them and supporting them with the goal of helping them.

To care at depth is to be genuinely present
for another

To accompany another involves being fully authentic with another.

For me this is all summarised in the words of Maya Angelou:

“I’ve learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I’ve learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I’ve learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you’ll miss them when they’re gone from your life. I’ve learned that making a “living” is not the same thing as making a “life.” I’ve learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back. I’ve learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision. I’ve learned that even when I have pains, I don’t have to be one. I’ve learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I’ve learned that I still have a lot to learn. I’ve

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learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Thank you

Donald Macaskill
CEO
Scottish Care
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