Welcome to the eighth e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk. Sometimes we talk as if older people are all the same or as if, when they need to receive more care, older people stop being active in prayer and spiritual life. But in this issue we see how the spirituality of older people can be as vibrant, and as challenging, as at other times of life.

From time to time I meet up with several people who care passionately about the spirituality of older people. A number of them have first-hand experience of getting older, and everyone is active in different ways to encourage the prayer and spiritual life of older people. For me, our meetings stand out as times of energy and laughter.

This does not mean that we don’t talk about struggles, illness, dying and death. We do. But perhaps having needed the courage to face these things for ourselves, or for people we care for, has brought certain kinds of freedom. These are felt both in our own lives and in walking alongside others, some of whom continue to struggle.

In this issue someone shares her experience of getting older (page 2). Someone else tells how their local worship-and-lunch developed (page 3) then two others share their experiences of nursing homes as an individual visitor and as chaplain (pages 4 and 5). One also describes his recent experience as a patient in hospital (page 6), and an ex-hospice chaplain reflects on her experience of accompanying people who are dying (page 7). Information on a relevant book, on opportunities for Exploring Prayer in 2016, and other events can be found on page 8.

As usual, if this e-newsletter was passed on to you and you want to receive it directly please contact me, Anne Spalding, Spirituality Advisor, on anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org or 01394 610065.
Growing Older

Rosemary Carr cared for her husband who had very troublesome memories but died seeing angels. She has found a new boldness to speak and pray for people – even at the bus stop! Here she shares her current experience of getting older:

This year has seen a radical change in my life after I succumbed to a nasty four month bug just after Christmas: now I walk with a stick and anticipate a hip replacement. Old age is here for me which I did not expect, despite the excitement of planning my 80th birthday party in late summer. Ever the ostrich with my head in the sand! But I feel a new bond with those in a similar state, no longer the barrier of them and us as we together plough this narrow furrow. I rejoice to find humour there and an identifying closeness with my brothers and sisters.

There’s a man on crutches on the Green where I live who walks his very active terrier (what courage!) and this week two young lads offered to post my letters as I struggled to get out of the car. This does not mean that I’m not pretty fed up and in pain, but I see our dependence upon one another as never before and it is a chance to learn about the humility of acceptance of help, not an easy route for my stubborn pride. My sheep teach me much as I see the lambs dependent upon their mothers and we are totally in the hands of the Good Shepherd who (as I tell anyone who will listen!) has promised us new bodies in Heaven. Meanwhile still living in optimism we can share thoughts and prayers and encourage one another. Life is often amazing.
Lunch and laughter

Judy Hailes’ effort to create an act of worship outside the church building now has a life of its own:

Tuesday at Haysel House offers a warm welcome to a short service and a soup lunch to anybody living in or with connections to the benefice. The soup is mostly given and a donation for the lunch is voluntary. There is always tea or coffee and birthdays are celebrated with a cake. The birthdays come round quite frequently! Everyone who comes soon makes it their own, hence there is always enough help and support, with contributions to both the worship and the soup.

The fellowship and joy generated supports both practically and prayerfully individuals and groups within the benefice, funding for Jocelyn living in Rwanda, and we contribute to the Benefice Quota.

The warm welcome is extended to visitors.

We meet at Haysel House which is a complex of 14 bungalows and a flat with a community room and kitchen for the over 55s in Coddenham. It was built with a legacy from a brother and two sisters now called The Day Foundation. They were faithful worshippers at St Mary’s all their lives and the complex was the idea of the last surviving sister before she died. Sadly Mary never lived to see it all come to fruition.

My involvement began during the Diocesan Ministry Course with instructions to create an act of worship outside the church building. There were requests for more and with support from my then priest the ‘Benefice Service and Soup Lunch’ was born. We have just celebrated our eleventh birthday.

If you want to know more, contact Judy on 01449 760375 judithhailes@btinternet.com
Visiting a Nursing Home

Jeremy Harrold found that, as a vicar, visiting older people at home or in nursing homes with communion was a valuable ministry. Now retired, he reflects on his recent experience of visiting three elderly church members in a nursing home over three years:

I found that in going weekly I was able to develop the relationship, and keep it going. I did not take residents communion, but would always read from the Bible, comment on the reading and say a prayer. I found that 15 minutes was the least time I could give to each person for it to be worthwhile. I found that they appreciated readings from the Lion Classic Bible which in fact had been written for young people and has good illustrations. Some of the psalms are also good.

I would always start by talking about any recent church or local news so that they could still feel part of the wider community.

Where it was possible I tried to wheel them into a lounge or round the garden, so that they were out of their room for the time we were together. One resident said how much he liked to feel the sun on his face when we sat on the veranda. He also said that the short time we had together had made his week.

It seemed important that the readings and prayers reflected the presence of God with them. My prayer would include praying for their family and the church they belonged to, and for God’s Blessing on them. I would ask if they would like to join in the Lord’s Prayer, and often they would, if said slowly and without any pressure to say it all.

I felt that the Christian year was a great help, saying what had happened at Church at Christmas or Easter often sparked memories for them, also using the appropriate readings and prayers for the time of year.

I found that sitting in silence, perhaps holding their hand, was a good thing. When I stayed for a cup of tea with one resident because I was waiting to see someone else, it always felt a very positive experience, creating companionship.
Spirituality for Elderly People living in a Nursing Home

Freddie Montgomery, a Reader, shares her experience as a chaplain in a care home with many different areas of care, including palliative:

There may be no comprehension of what 'spirituality' really means so I find there are three important elements in supporting and encouraging spirituality of people in the home:

1. Initial Approach

This concept is best understood 'instinctively'. No books written to date will help here because each member of this small community is a different character. My primary concerns are showing love – mutual care – respecting their dignity and, above all, showing understanding.

In practice, useful starting points in building up a relationship may be based on asking about their last home, their interests, about family members, and finally, indirectly, careful conversation over a period of time (if they have it) can help to establish their degree of faith (past and present).

2. Listening

Listening is more important than talking. The elderly love to talk and remember their past experiences – so let them 'chatter' on, for in the telling their listener establishes/ reinstates dignity.

3. Worshipping

This is one of my prime concerns as a Minister. It must be open to all and people will choose to join in or not. Not only can worship be therapeutic – a sense of belonging to a group – but it will often lead into quite revealing discussions.

Familiar hymns help (we have a book of favourites which I have produced in large type) – for they love to sing, and short readings also help.
Spiritual journeys in hospital

Jeremy Harrold had a new experience when he was a hospital patient himself:

Last year I sat with other patients waiting for radiotherapy at Ipswich Hospital, coming daily for 35 treatments over two months. We each waited for about an hour each day preparing for the fifteen minutes of treatment. Over time you got to know some people quite well, and it was very encouraging how good patients and staff were at talking and supporting each other.

Most of us were anxious when starting and some were facing very serious conditions.

I saw two sons with their mother, holding hands and praying, which led me to talk to them about our Christian faith which we had in common. I sat next to a mother who was brought by her two daughters and got talking. I gave her a leaflet I had which had readings and prayers for people to use in hospital. She and her daughters found it very helpful and were most thankful for it.

I would pray each day that God would be with all who were there and lead me to any who I should speak to. Some people showed great anxiety, and just sitting beside people and allowing them to talk if they wanted to was helpful.

I kept a personal diary of the experience, recording my own anxieties at the beginning, and tiredness as the treatment progressed. I also recorded the spiritual benefit I had personally received from a loving care of the staff, the prayers and support of church members, help of neighbours, relations, and church members who gave me lifts when I did not feel able to go by bus. I also felt the presence of Christ when I sat out in the garden after the treatment was over each day. I felt I had grown spiritually through the experience.
Endings?

Marian Carter was a hospice chaplain and reflects on her experience of, and thinking about, people dying:

The end of life is certain: Woody Allen said ‘It’s not that I’m afraid of dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.’ In contrast, the theologian Jürgen Moltmann believes ‘to live as if there were no death is to live an illusion. Death acts as a catalyst… it enhances our pleasure in the living of life.’

Dying is a process of detachment, with many fears. Some feel guilty about sin and fear judgement, or a fear of the unknown, and/or a fear of the process of dying. My dad at 92 was fearful at the thought of meeting his Maker; he felt guilty, inadequate. Similarly Alf, said: ‘If I’m dying what can I do? I’m frightened.’

Sin and guilt are reflections of the shadow side of life. Shakespeare said: ‘This thing of darkness, I acknowledge mine’, and St Paul, ‘I do not do what I want, but I do the very things I hate’ (Romans 7.15f.). Forgiveness is helped by the ministry of reconciliation: sins are spoken, heard, acknowledged, and forgiveness received as the gift of God’s grace and mercy. So Judy, Alf’s daughter, arranged for a priest to visit. Alf was able to say sorry and ask forgiveness. His priest knelt beside his bed made the sign of the cross in oil on his head and said, ‘Alf you are forgiven by God.’ This pastoral act gave Alf assurance of God’s presence; a few days later he died in peace.

What of life beyond death? Many adults believe in an afterlife but the emphasis has moved from an afterlife to the quality of dying. In a Christian society a good death meant preparation: repentance, confession, absolution, peace with the hope of resurrection. This strand of dying has continued, but today for non-Christians a ‘good death’ is pain relief, advanced planning, dying with loved ones near, each significant in Hospices. There is a belief that ‘we carry on... somewhere nice’, away from the horrors of life, and a yearning for justice, the righting of this world’s wrongs. There is an expectation that this is only possible in an afterlife, but there is no mention of God. If we are present at a death, we are aware of the silence and speak of something changing – the soul departing? We know that our physical body turns to dust. Paul wrote of a transformed spiritual body. Life beyond death is a Hope, based on God’s grace and the resurrection of Christ.

Another Book

*Seasons of my Soul: Conversations in the second half of life*  

The Methodist Church and Church of England have put together eight themes for conversations: identity; memories; transition times; wisdom; roles and relationships; forgiveness and reconciliation; death and dying; and celebration of life. They can be explored using the provided interactive conversation tools, Bible texts, creative activities, social action topics, prayer and worship.

Events

**Exploring Prayer**

Thank you to everyone who came to this event in July and made it a prayerful day. People said:

*Thank you for the chance to restore my soul.*

*Very helpful. Thank you for all the workshops.*

*Thank you for an inspiring and practical day.*

Lots of people said ‘More please’ so put Exploring Prayer 2016 in your diaries – **Saturday 2 July** at the Cathedral.

Before then, another opportunity for prayer exploration:  
**Jane Williams: Praying for Others)**  
A workshop on **Wednesday 2 March 2016, 2 – 5pm, repeated 7 – 9pm**. Details out soon.

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**Engaging Luke: Stories, symbols, actions and prayer**

**Thursday 24 September, 9.30am – 3.30pm, at the St Nicholas Centre, Ipswich or Saturday 17 October, 9.30am – 3.30pm, at the Hyndman Centre, Bury St Edmunds**

Engaging Luke is designed to help anyone who is interested to make the most of the Year of Luke, which starts on Advent Sunday 2015.

Cost £7. Bring your own lunch – refreshments provided. For more information contact Lesley Steed at the MET office on 01473 298510 or lesley.steed@cofesuffolk.org

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**The Gift of Christ: A day of preparation for Advent**

*The Simeon Centre*

**Saturday 5 December 2015**  
10am – 4pm at Ridley Hall, Cambridge CB3 9HG

Registration Fee: £20 (Please bring a packed lunch; drinks will be provided.)

Book your place at: www.simeoncentre.co.uk or call 01223 746590