

The Selwyn Centre for Ageing and Spirituality



October 2010

Is spirituality back in fashion? Well, not quite, but in the two years that The Selwyn Centre for Ageing and Spirituality has been running, I have discovered that there is a great interest in spirituality in New Zealand. As well, there is an ongoing concern about how we might cope with increasing numbers of older people.

That spirituality is important for wellbeing is acknowledged in the WHO definition of health and in many of our own Government's policy documents. Health and aged care workers need to understand how to assess and respond to spiritual need, but this vital aspect of elder care is often neglected because of time constraints, lack of expertise and an emphasis on the physical. Elizabeth MacKinlay said it like this:

"If we do not assess for spiritual needs, we will not even begin to notice these needs, nor find ways of addressing them. As I see it, spiritual needs underlie the psychosocial needs of people – they lie at the very core of what it is to be human. If we neglect these, especially for people at critical points of their lives and for those who are facing their frailty, dying and death, then we neglect something equally important as failing to provide food... Spiritual care can no longer be seen as an optional care component." (p.69, Spiritual Care in the Fourth Age. 2006)

The purpose of The Selwyn Centre for Ageing and Spirituality is to advocate, research and educate about spirituality in ageing – the ultimate goal being to increase wellbeing in our older people and to provide truly holistic care.

2010 has been a year of consolidation. Many of the people from last year's conference remain in contact, and their research into ageing and spirituality is beginning to fill the void of local information.

Education

Ageing and Spirituality workshops for health and aged care workers, facilitated by Taruni Falconer, have been run in Auckland, Tauranga and Hawkes Bay. As usual, participants have responded very positively as this has been such a neglected, yet vital, part of the care of older people.

"What a privilege to have been able to attend the two sessions of Spirituality and Ageing these past two Fridays. It has been a truly uplifting, nourishing, hands-on or should I say "hearts-on" experience. I have gained and been given so much and now, hopefully, I will be able to connect more readily with our residents and give something back to them." (Nurse in aged care facility)

I have collated our experiences and presented a paper entitled "Learning about spirituality in the health and aged care sectors: what the workers teach us and what we teach them: a New Zealand experience" at the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS) conference in Canberra in September. In this presentation I acknowledge how much I have learned from the many wise people who attend our workshops! The PowerPoint presentation is available on the SCAS website (under 'Education').



At the Auckland course

Ageing and Pastoral Care courses have been held in Auckland, Wellington and, in October, in Palmerston North. This training is for committed Christians who are members of a church community. There are three modules, each taking 15 hours in total. The Auckland group will be doing Module III in October/November 2010, thus gaining the *Certificate in Ageing and Pastoral Care*. We hope to run these next year in Tauranga and in other places as requested.

Some comments are provided below about the course, the participants and Anne Russell-Brighty, the facilitator:

"...this course has been a real blessing for me in my job and directing me in my journey ahead."

"Great to hear and share work/experiences with so many well-qualified and professional people. Quite inspiring the depth of knowledge and experience in the group."

"Having been an instructor/teacher myself, I don't think I have ever experienced a better presenter and human being."

We are planning our programme for 2011. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who would like either workshop run in their area. The best number for each workshop is around 20, allowing for the sensitive nature of some topics, but enough to cover costs.



A group at St George's Church, Thames

Survey of pastoral carers

I surveyed people providing pastoral care to residents in aged care about their educational needs. Loneliness was identified by all of the respondents as being a significant issue for people in care. They overwhelmingly opted for one-day meetings. Dealing with people with dementia was high on the list of what they would like to learn about. A summary of the survey will be on the SCAS website (under 'Research').

Survey of churches

After much design and re-design, we have set up a survey asking about churches' educational needs regarding older people. This is on *Survey Monkey* at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/XNMW8ZV>. If you are unable to access this, I can provide a paper or email copy.

Other events

Visit of Graham Stokes

On Monday 30th August, Graham Stokes, an expert on dementia care, held us spellbound for two hours when speaking on "Caring for people with dementia: myth or reality?".

His approach of really trying to understand the individual with dementia and attempting to meet their needs, even when it is difficult to determine what they are, fits well with a spiritual understanding of each individual as deserving of respect and compassion. A small portion of his talk was aired on TV1's 'Sunday' programme on 3rd October.



Graham Stokes with Chris Perkins

Elizabeth MacKinlay - NZ visit, 2011

I am in the early stages of arranging for the Revd Dr Elizabeth MacKinlay, Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CKPS), to visit New Zealand in March next year. Elizabeth will run workshops on spiritual reminiscence at venues around the country, as well as some seminars addressing other issues of ageing and spirituality.

More educational opportunities

Distance learning courses in ageing and pastoral studies - C.A.P.S

More information about these Post-graduate Certificate, Diploma and Masters courses can be obtained through www.centreforageing.org.nz/ (go to 'Courses'). Enrolments for 2011 courses close on 1st December 2010. If you would like to talk to me about these, please contact me - I am just finishing my paper for the Diploma.

Research

Scholarships

We have established three \$5,000 post-graduate scholarships for research into ageing and spirituality at Auckland, Victoria and Otago Universities. These will be available for the October round of applications this year. We hope this will encourage people to research the topic, from a variety of angles, depending on their discipline.

Collating New Zealand Research

I had foolishly volunteered to collate the New Zealand research on spirituality. This has come to 21 pages - 193 papers/books/theses/works in progress. The range of topics is fascinating - from spirituality in education, to adventure tourism and goddess worship, to the more easily anticipated Maori spirituality, palliative care and mental health. There is not a lot on ageing and spirituality. I will put this (no doubt, incomplete) collection on the website www.selwyncare.org.nz/scas under research.

If you know of other NZ research, particularly in the area of spirituality and wellbeing, please let me know so I can add it to the list.

Advocacy

I hope that ongoing education and discussion is raising the profile of spirituality. I am part of a small group beginning to look at advocacy for spirituality as a part of wellbeing in general. An article in *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services* (Vol. 6 Issue 2 June 2010) sets out my view on "Older people and spirituality in New Zealand: the need for leadership".



My thanks to the Advisory group for their wise input, especially to the Revd Dr Warren Limbrook who has recently stood down. We welcome the Revd Rob MacKay who has agreed to join us.

It is great to see some flowers out and to enjoy the longer days.

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