

Pastoral Care 1

Acts 6:1-7, Mark 3:31-35 [MW18-13]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 15 April 2018

This week we begin our focus on 'Pastoral Care'

- Pastoral Care has to do with looking after each other
it is about being good neighbours
and putting Jesus' words about love for each other into action
- Pastoral Care is about noticing a need or situation
that someone in this church has – and doing something about it

In our Gospel reading, Mark 3:31-35

- it seems to me Jesus basically says:
everyone who gathers around him is a member of his family
- Jesus looked at the people around him and said:
“Here are my mother and my brothers ...”
- following on from this it also seems to me
that everyone who is in Jesus' family deserves to be noticed and cared about

Our reading from the Book of Acts tells us about a particular situation

- in the early church, right after Jesus had returned to heaven
when some people, some people who had gathered around Jesus
and were therefore part of the church family
- were not being noticed and cared about [Acts 6:1-7]

Some people in the church were missing out

- the 'Greek speaking widows' were not being cared for
their needs were being overlooked
- it was obviously a situation that had been going on for some time
it was not being remedied and so there were complaints
- finally it was drawn to the attention of the leaders
who said this is not good, we had better do something
- so they called a meeting, came up with a solution
and put it into practice
- it was a system of practical care
making sure that everyone received what they needed

And it seems to me we are in the same position today

- we need to do “something”
so that those in this particular branch of Jesus' family
are cared for, feel included, know that they belong and are important
- hence our 'focus on Pastoral Care'

Please let me assure you I am aware that there is genuine pastoral care

- going on in our church
thank you to all those who have been and are involved with this
- however I am also aware that there are occasions when people in need
have been missed out or overlooked

As the “Head Shepherd” of this particular flock

- pastoral care is in the first instance my responsibility
which is why those in my position are sometimes called “Pastors”
- this duty of care is my responsibility
however that does not mean I will or that I am even able to carry it all out
- I am responsible to make sure it happens
and in order to be able to do that, there is one very basic detail
one thing that needs to happen to start the whole thing off
- any idea what this is???

At the fundamental level, for any pastoral care to be able to be done

- somebody needs to know ... and tell
somebody who knows there is a particular situation, need, person in difficulty
has to tell someone else so that something can be done

In a parish where I was Vicar (not in this Diocese) both Church Wardens received a very strong and angry complaint from a person who had been ill, was confined to bed and the Vicar, me, had not bothered to visit. One of the Wardens inquired if the doctor had visited and was told that indeed he had. “So,” said the Warden, “how did he know to come? Did he just turn up?” “Oh no,” said the person, “I phoned him.” “I see,” said the Warden. And the penny dropped ...

At our ordinations, church ministers do not suddenly and amazingly

- receive the gift of knowing such things ... we do need to be told:
in every situation I am pretty sure someone in the church family will know
of a particular situation or need
- the person who knows needs to tell someone so something can happen
so here and now let me outline a very basic “system”

If you know of someone who is ill or in hospital or gets bad news

- or something significant happens to them, please let me know
I will visit or make contact or make sure something happens
- you may wish to do something yourself, or have already visited etc.
which is just great ... however please tell me anyway or as well
- also, please do not assume I will know
I would rather have 17 people tell me the same thing than none
I will not tell you if you are the 18th and I am always grateful to be told
- and remember you can also contact our Wardens
their contact details are in the Pew News/Pew Sheet
- let's start with that
if you know something about someone who has a particular need
tell me so we can make sure something is done to meet it

There are some really simple but effective things that can swing into action

- there is the world-famous in Hastings, Motueka and now Mangawhai/Wellsford
“chicken ministry” originated by my wife
which is where someone visits on behalf of our church with
a cooked chicken, buns, salad and chocolate biscuits
- as of last winter the chicken is sometimes replaced by soup
but you would be amazed how this enables people to be blessed

Then we could build up a “Freezer Ministry”

- where we have food and meals in a freezer here at church
which can be taken and given to people along with a card from the church
- it is always easier to visit someone when you are taking something to give
and it is a tangible sign of our care
- however just noticing
and turning up on behalf of the church family makes a huge difference

So for this week – an introduction about “Pastoral Care”

- yes it happens already and that is great
however it can be a bit hit and miss
with some people and situations being overlooked
- but usually somebody knows something
please do not assume others do, especially me
please let me or one of our Wardens know

And I am inviting you to consider this “pastoral care”

- there may be some of you who have a particular interest or concern
remember Jesus looked around and said: “Here is my family”
the Apostles in Acts said:
“Here is a system that will enable this church family to be looked after”
- I have a way of moving forward that I think will work for us
that is manageable and sustainable
so I am inviting those with an interest in this area to meet with me
so we can work on it together
- please add your name and phone number to the list on the noticeboard
or talk to me

Pastoral Care is the foundation of who we are and what we do as followers of Jesus

- in fact as the 'body of Christ'
kind of like this from one of my favourite writers
Philip Gulley, Pastor of a small town church in the Midwest of the United States

When I was in the fourth grade, I was offered a job as a paper boy. It didn't pay much money, but I knew having a job would build my character so I took it, good character being important to fourth-graders. My lessons started the first day on the job. A customer paying his bill asked me if I wanted a tip, and I said, "Sure." He said, "Stay away from wild women."

One of my customers was a lady named Mrs. Stanley She was a widow and not prone to wild living, so I took to lingering on her front porch during my rounds. She'd watch for me to come down her street, and by the time I'd pedaled up to her house, there'd be a slushy bottle of Coke waiting for me. I'd sit and drink while she talked. That was our understanding - I drank, she talked.

The widow Stanley talked mostly about her dead husband, Roger. "Roger and I went grocery shopping this morning over to the IGA," she'd say The first time she said that, the Coke went up my nose. That was back in the days when Coke going up your nose wasn't a crime, just a mite uncomfortable.

Went home and told my father about Mrs. Stanley and how she talked as if Mr. Stanley were still alive. Dad said she was probably lonely, and that maybe I just ought to sit and listen and nod my head and smile, and maybe she'd work it out of her system. So that's what I did. I figured this was where the character-building came into play. Turned out Dad was right. After a few summers, she seemed content to leave her husband over at the South Cemetery.

Nowadays, we'd send Mrs. Stanley to a psychiatrist. But all she had back then was a front porch rocker and her paper boy's ear, which turned out to be enough.

I quit my paper route after her healing. Moved on to the lucrative business of lawn mowing. Didn't see the widow Stanley for several years. Then we crossed paths up at the Christian Church's annual fund-raiser dinner. She was standing behind the steam table spooning out mashed potatoes and looking radiant. Four years before she'd had to bribe her paper boy with a Coke to have someone to talk with; now she had friends brimming over. Her husband was gone, but life went on. She had her community and was luminous with love.

Community is a beautiful thing; sometimes it even heals us and makes us better than we would otherwise be.

I live in the city now. My front porch is a concrete slab. And my paper boy is a lady named Edna with three kids and a twelve-year-old Honda. Every day she asks me how I'm doing. When I don't say "fine," she sticks around long enough to find out why. She's such a nice lady that sometimes I act as if I have a problem, just so she'll tarry. She's lived in the city all her life, but she knows about community too.

Community isn't so much a locale as it is a state of mind. You find it whenever folks ask how you're doing because they care, and not because they're getting paid to inquire.

Two thousand years ago, a church elder named Peter wrote the recipe for community. "Above all else," he wrote, "hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). That means when you love a person, you occasionally have to turn a blind eye toward their shortcomings.

Kind of like what my dad told me about the widow Stanley. Sometimes it's better to nod your head and smile.

Psychiatrists call that "enabling denial," but back when I delivered papers, we called it "compassion."

That's what "Pastoral Care" is all about ... let us pray