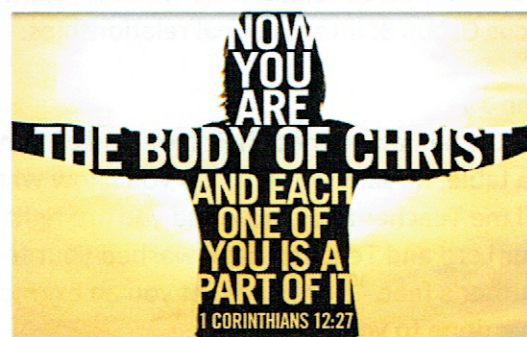


Pastoral Care as community endeavour

We have, as a Church and society, privatised the care of others. In the growth of hospitals and care homes we have moved away from the family as the basic unit of caregiving. This is not necessarily a bad thing – as professionals often exceed the abilities of families to give specialist care.

However, a changing society has left more and more people adrift and again there are many who are in need of care yet lack the connections of family – due to geography, longer lifespans, changing family dynamics, financial constraints and government cutbacks. Many people are simply ‘falling through the net’ and as a Church we have the responsibility to offer care to all in need – even as we speak out against structures that leave people lonely, sick and uncared for.

In the Church we have gravitated towards a model of ‘the professionally religious’ where Clergy have drawn the ultimate need for pastoral care to themselves or had the responsibility handed to them. In many traditions we call our Clergy ‘Pastors’ – which used to mean ‘spiritual shepherds’ of the flock of the Church, but has come to mean the one who is expected to care for the needs of the community – visit the sick, comfort the dying, meet the spiritual needs of those connected to the Church. It is time to reconnect with the Biblical model of Christian community being a body of believers who genuinely live with the idea that ‘when one suffers, all suffer’ (1 Corinthians 12.26) and that we all bear responsibility for being ‘a priesthood of all believers’. Though the Clergy are often (but not always) trained in areas of pastoral care – counselling, bereavement ministry, Clinical pastoral education, etc – the model of the ‘Vicar’ who takes care of ‘members of his/her flock’ is an inadequate one both theologically and practically for the present Church.



Ultimately the power of the Church, and the responsibility for pastoral care, resides not in the hands of any one individual but in the community. It is in the community that we find the strength, and resources, to minister to one another – through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and through paying attention to the life within us and the life within each other.

How do we move to a more inclusive pastoral model? We will need:

Training
Accountability
Support
Supervision

So we have three questions to ponder and take with us:

1. How does Pastoral Care take place in our community?
2. What part should we have in Pastoral Care?
3. What resources would better enable the pastoral care our community offers?

Further Reading

<http://wn.anglican.org.nz/files/docs/ministry-mission/lay-ministry-papers-of-theology-pastoral-care.pdf>
Rediscovering Pastoral Care *Alastair V Campbell* Darton, Longman & Todd 1985
A Critique of Pastoral Care *Stephen Parrison* SCM 1988