

CREATIVITY and the DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CHURCH

Exchanging the Gifts

Notes and advice on interpreting the words of someone with dementia.

Dr Jennifer Bute was the keynote speaker, she has had dementia for 10 years and now needs to read from notes. She spoke on her own feelings of the last ten years as someone with dementia. Jennifer was a GP for 25 years and saw many patients with dementia. When she was first diagnosed she did not feel that God had abandoned her but that she had been given a gift by Him and that she was very precious to God. She quoted Isaiah who said 'You will never get lost'. However, everyone is different.

She is convinced the memories are there the difficulty is retrieving them. Jennifer had met someone in the Supermarket recently who greeted her but she didn't recognise this friend and said "I don't know you". Her friend persisted reminding her that they had been at an event the previous week and what the event was about. Jennifer also persisted telling her friend "I have never met you before in my life". With more prompts from her friend Jennifer said suddenly, the memories came flooding back and she remembered the event and her friend.

Perception is a problem for those with dementia, the words do not link up with their sound. Never ask a person with dementia a direct question.

When someone with dementia says:

- "Can I go home". That person is really saying they are not comfortable.
- "What time is it?" The person is not sure what they can do.

Jennifer gave an insight into the feelings of the carer of the person with dementia, often the wife or husband who is often often distressed when the person cared for says, "Who are you?" and does not recognise their carer. That is because he/she is 'time travelling', effectively going back in time with a picture of their partner as a younger person, not wearing spectacles and different coloured hair before it turned to grey or white.

Most of the time those with dementia are bewildered and fearful. Routine is important and the emphasis needs to be on what the person can do, not what they cannot do. Their coping patterns emerge from the past when they were a child.

When befriending someone with dementia, always approach them from the front, introduce yourself, sit near them, touch their hand, be patient, calm and don't ask questions. Talk slowly, a one sided conversation at first.

Carers feel sad, discouraged, overwhelmed resentful. Alone, angry, embarrassed, trapped, frightened, bewildered and have a feeling of guilt.

How you treat people with dementia affects their physical condition.

They never trust those who lie to them and they never forget it.

(You can be economical with the truth.)

