

LCA Parish Nurse News

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PCN serves as a convention chaplain

Angela Uhrhane, Pastoral Care Nurse at Lutheran Aged Care Albury, was one of a team of pastors and lay people who served as official chaplains at the six-day General Convention of the LCA held at Rosehill Gardens, NSW, in October. When asked about her role, Angela said: ‘I don’t stop being a chaplain. It’s who I am. It’s what I do!’

Since 2015, the LCA has had a distinctive focus on chaplaincy at General Conventions of Synod. The role this year included leading the Prayer of the Church in morning worship, conducting evening devotions, leading table graces, and praying for individuals, groups or into specific situations on request of the chairman.

There were also other instances where they were invaluable as the synod discussed a number of emotive issues and raised questions that may have triggered a need for pastoral care for some people in attendance.

The team included both men and women, ordained and lay members, who worked closely together. They met at the end of each day to debrief and pray about what had occurred during the day. They also had the opportunity to debrief and receive advice themselves from the head chaplain, Pastor Andrew Brook, or Pastor Wegener.

Most of the team’s work was done in two locations: the

convention chapel and in the business centre. Individual chaplains and spiritual carers were rostered to serve in both areas during their ‘official’ duties.

‘In the chapel we let people sit’, Angela said. The aim was to discern whether they just wanted to be quiet or if they wanted some company. She said it was always a team approach where consideration was given to who might be best to go alongside.

On the floor, team members spent much of their time listening, being observant, and scanning the room for signs of physical or spiritual distress. They took referrals from ushers or table facilitators and other delegates who noticed people showing signs that they need someone to talk to.

Team members were also present in the visitors room, so anyone attending the convention was able to speak to a chaplain or spiritual carer if they needed to.

Ministry of presence

Following is a precis of an article prepared by Angela Uhrhane, and first published in the Parish Nurse newsletter of the Luthern Church-Missouri Synod.

In my role as Pastoral Care Nurse, the ministry of presence is there on a daily basis in many aspects:

- to the staff by just being available;
- to a resident, by there in times of joy, in an ordinary day, in times of crisis, and in times of death and dying.

If we break it down, the ministry of presence is about relationship. It is about stories, and journeying alongside people. At the root of the ministry of presence is the presence of Jesus and God's great love for us, with the promise that he will never abandon us.

My most vivid memory of the ministry of presence is being with a family as they sat with their dying mum. This resident's daughter came from 300 km away to be with her mum in her dying days. The family of three daughters with their partners and children had been told by a medical officer that 'it won't be long till your mum passes away; all the signs are there'.

I called by to see how the family was travelling. The resident was unconscious and not responding to verbal stimuli. She had a syringe driver in with morphine and midazolam for symptom management, and looked very comfortable. The resident was tiny and frail in the bed.

I called in almost every day, sometimes for a short time, sometimes for a long time. For 21 days this lady was in this state. The youngest of daughter sat and did not leave her mum. We talked about many things: her journey in life as a child, as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, as a musician, and about her Christian walk and her spirituality.

Her mother died and I was asked to officiate at the funeral. We worked together with the rest of the family to pull it together to remember their Mum, and grandmother.

This is the ministry of presence.

Sometimes people wonder what I do as I wander around the corridors, chat with people in their rooms or in the lounge or in the dining room before lunch. I swan into people's offices; stop, chat, listen, share a little too. I love what I do and I feel so blessed that God has placed me here. My sense of call in the place where I am is still strong even after more than eight

years. I am now a team leader and am pulled into more and more meetings. I ask myself what should I be doing? Where is my main focus? Can I do both – be with people and also set up programs, teach, organise? How do I balance that?

As a nurse, I am trusted by other nurses to understand their challenges and frustrations, but also their love for the residents and their confession of loving one more than another. 'We are not supposed to have favourites', said one nurse, 'but we do!' Yet, in saying that, there are the residents who are difficult to be with, who have speech difficulties, who can't hear so well. A visit with these people brings challenges, and I feel so inadequate at times; but that person is loved.

One lady who calls into my office often tells me: 'You are the only one who makes my time here bearable'. My ministry of presence is keeping my office door open so she can come in any time I am there. Spending time and building relationships with the people who are marginalised is difficult, interesting, exhausting and rewarding. When I think about it, Jesus often spent time with the marginalised people of society. For example, he went out into the heat of the day as with the woman at the well (John 4).

The ministry of presence sometimes means being quiet. It is about the other person's story not mine. It is about listening, not judging, not thinking ahead of what to say. It is about coming alongside. It is also about bringing hope, about validating what people say, about reminding someone that they are special.

There is fun in this ministry, too. I get to go to significant birthday parties, wedding anniversaries, happy hour, craft group and coffeeshop. Bingo does not lend itself to building relationships, so I only go for the cuppa afterwards! I go to staff meetings and resident meetings, but my ministry is not usually in the meeting but in the corridor before or after the meeting. There is no solid time frame so sometimes I am home late.

The ministry of presence is all in the relationship: God, me, the person I am with and me. God walks with me every day – he is always present.

Angela Uhrhane



LPNI study tours

Itineraries/registration forms are available for the 2019 Lutheran Parish Nurses International tour to Singapore, 3-9 October. The program includes a tour of the island, a night safari at the world-famous zoo, and a seminar at the Redeemer Lutheran church.

Local pastors will be invited to the afternoon session of the seminar to learn about the Parish Nurse ministry.

For more information, or a registration form, contact: robert.wiebusch@lca.org.au