

Chaplain's Message:

Whenever we hear that someone we know and love is unwell or in hospital, we want to do all we can to help them.

Maybe you are the kind of person who makes a phone call for a chat or sends encouraging text messages. Perhaps you cook, bake, or arrange food for them or their family. Perhaps you send flowers or gifts to brighten their day. You might activate the church's prayer chain, tree or network or uphold them in quiet prayer.

And then maybe, you are a person who visits.

For many of us, visiting people in hospital can be a scary proposition. All those machines, bells and whistles; all those tubes and wires, the bustle of people coming into the room.

We sometimes let our stresses get in the way of caring for our loved one.

So, it may come as a surprise to hear that often, I get a little nervous about visiting people in hospital. What will I find when I walk in? Will they be welcoming? Will they be awake? In the end, there's usually nothing to worry about and it has been a blessed time of conversation and connection. I leave wondering what I was so worried about and often, the patient tells me our time together has been an encouragement and a blessing to them.

However, I never fully realised the power of a pastoral visit in hospital until I was the recipient of one myself.

Our eldest son had some significant special needs and would occasionally need to spend a little time in hospital. Often, I would stay in with him as his Carer while my wife looked after our two other children. It was during one of these times early on in my role as Chaplaincy Coordinator that we were visited by one of our Assistant Chaplains. Our Assistant Chaplains are people from local Uniting Church congregations who have had some training in pastoral care in healthcare and aged care settings, and who visit people connected with the Uniting Church.

On this occasion, my son and I were in hospital on the morning Assistant Chaplain Adele was due to visit. No doubt we had had a rough night and weren't looking our best nor feeling terribly sociable. Adele knocked and checked it was OK to come in.

Adele listened to the story of my son's admission to hospital and the prognosis for the rest of his stay. More than finding out simply *how we were*, she was also keen to find out *how we felt about being in hospital*. Adele then prayed for my son and I, and our family and she was on her way to visit the rest of the folks on her list.

Adele was with us for no more than 10 minutes, but that visit sustained us for the rest of our time in hospital. She wasn't concerned about how we looked or that we couldn't offer her a cup of tea or even a chair, she was concerned entirely for our well-being. In the years since, my son and I have needed to stay in hospital a few times, and each time, we both have been the recipients of sustaining and encouraging pastoral visits.

The power that lies in a pastoral visit with a person in hospital or aged care is not in the length of time we spend with the person, but the quality of our time together. A 10-minute flying visit where we find out how the person is feeling about their situation and help make sense of those feelings can be just as beneficial as an hour sitting in comfortable silence.

The theme of 'When I was sick, you visited me' has its basis in Matthew 25 and the passage of the sheep and goats. You know the one – *"when I was hungry you gave me something to eat...when I was sick you looked after me...when I was in prison, you came to visit me"*. As so often happens with what is required of us by the Maker – the things we are called to do for others has the blessing in it for us too. Matthew 25 tells us that when we feed, clothe, visit and welcome the least in our community, we are doing this to Jesus himself – and in so doing, we receive our inheritance in the Kingdom.

Often, the ministry of chaplaincy is described as a 'ministry of presence' – the benefit to the other person is that we are simply 'there'.

So never underestimate the power of a visit to someone in hospital or aged care. It has value on so many levels. You are a blessing to the other person with the effort you made to get there, you are a blessing with your presence and your gift remains long after you've left.

Andrew Shearer-Cox



Chaplaincy Sunday
AUG / SEP - 2021
When I was sick, you visited me