

AGEING AS A BRAIDED RIVER

WORKSHOP NOTES 30.8.15, ACSD TRAINING EVENT,
WELLINGTON : SUE PICKERING

This title came to mind when I was asked if I would do a workshop ... at that stage I didn't know much about braided rivers, but I knew they would have something to say to us and the more I've researched,¹ the more relevant I've found these fascinating rivers to be to spiritual growth and to ageing in particular. I even wondered what it might be like to be a fluvial geomorphologist ... quite a mouthful isn't it ... if we think that it's hard to explain what we do as spiritual directors, try explaining what a fluvial geomorphologist does!!! Actually it's simply the name for someone who studies the way river flows interact with the natural and human-shaped environment.



Before we get under way I want to acknowledge all of you - looking around this group, there are *centuries* of wisdom and experience in both life and spiritual direction practice [laughter]. And for some of you, the braided rivers are part of your own story, so may this workshop be an opportunity to revisit some of your own story and special places.

SLIDE 1 : Rangitata River [front cover of *Braided River Field Guide* – my photo]

SLIDES 2-3 : Features of braided rivers

As you look at this list, consider how these features might reflect the processes of ageing and spiritual exploration

- networks of channels that are forever changing and shifting
- frequent disturbance by 'floods and freshes' - 'floods' are very substantial and potentially catastrophic increases in water flow which shift large amounts of sediment and even large boulders. They affect flora and fauna but the environment and its creatures can recover/adapt over time; 'freshes' refer to smaller, less destructive changes in river flow which can be beneficial as they can shift accumulated silt and slime
- depend on abundant supplies of gravelly sediment – we all have a sense of what 'rubs' or 'settles' in our lives but perhaps we don't always see that these can be places where new life is nurtured
- have erodable edges – a key feature – the potential for expansiveness, for the edges to become flexible / fuzzy
- provide nurture for a unique community of life – some birds and fish and plants grow best in these conditions or are found only in this environment, harsh though it may seem
- culminate in 'hapua' – an elongated lagoon parallel to the coast and discharging to the ocean via an 'ephemeral outlet' [the scientific description] ... 'hapua' is a Maori term in global use to describe this type of gathering of the waters before the river flows to the sea through a comparatively narrow, changing stream.

¹ *Wild Rivers*, John Donald Mackay , Hodder & Stoughton, 1978, Chapter 3 Mackenzie's braided rivers. AND *Braided River Field Guide*, Barry Hibbert, 2001, Dept of Conservation

MUSIC :

As you listen to a portion of *Children of the River* from Secret Garden's CD 'Dawn of a New Century' track 7 – 2m27', you may like to imagine yourself starting the journey from the depths of the mountains out to the broadening plain ...

REFLECT on any words which come to mind about what you felt or thought ... some might feel it represents the energy and vitality of first half of life spirituality, full of hope and dreams and movement

SLIDE 4: Second half of life spirituality

In the first half of life by mid/late-mid life we achieve what the mystics call 'proficiency' – an essential maturity in which we have established an identity, come to terms with our sexuality, discovered our vocation, made key relationship/s, have an idea of who God might be for us and explored how we might express our spirituality. Institutional religion in the west seems to focus on this part of our journey and little attention is paid to the differences and opportunities which second half of life spirituality presents.

Rolheiser [also Merton and Rohr etc] speak of second half of life spirituality :

- To return to our eternal home with God, we have first to shed many of the things that we legitimately acquired and attached ourselves to during the first half of life.
- The spiritual task of the second-half of life, so different from the first, is *to let go*, to move the nakedness that Job describes: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart.' [Job 1.21 NIV]

As spiritual directors we may find that directees who are 65+ may still struggle with first half of life tasks, particularly issues of self worth. Nor can we assume that they will have reflected at depth on their self image or their image of God. They may come to spiritual direction precisely because they are searching for the 'more' of God and have not been able to make any headway within their current context.

SLIDE 5: SPIRITUAL NEEDS DEFINITION

At the end of these notes you'll find a sheet listing twelve spiritual needs together with initial questions and scripture for use in spiritual direction with those who are ageing. Faith traditions have their own stories and spiritual practices – within the New Zealand culture using the stories of Jesus and people's encounters with God still has relevance in spiritual direction practice, especially among older people. If you or your directee are from another faith tradition then you would use these stories only with sensitivity to the individual.

- Spiritual direction conversations help directees work with **spiritual needs**. Ideally these will already have come to the directee's attention through prayerful insight, but this movement may be as a consequence of unexpected or chronic illness, or challenging circumstances.
- If these deep needs or longings are addressed, directees are able to let go in ways that are timely and attuned to their uniqueness.

SLIDE 6: FALLING, LETTING GO and UN*KNOWING – three focus streams for workshop

The streams of course flow in and out of each other all the time as floods and freshes affect them, but using this metaphor allows us to concentrate on the unique opportunities each stream offers. But first to the ...

SLIDE 7: CHALLENGES

As spiritual directors and in our own spiritual lives we are used to working with challenges – I want to name some of these but not dwell on them for long ...

- Resistance - we're all familiar with common strategies to avoid God – we look the other way when God is waving a flag in front of our noses, we ignore our own truth when it's painful or shameful, we pretend for a long time that the ego we present to the world is all there is of us ... our directees do all this and more.
- Reducing capacity to reflect and remember – the sad reality is that people can leave it too late to do cumulative deep inner work. Mental faculties can deteriorate with age – memory loss may dissolve insights gained in conversation or prayer. Work done in spiritual direction one session may sink to the deep parts of the mind before the next session or people may simply forget to turn up! BUT there is always the 'sacrament of the present moment' [de Caussade] and our trust that the person's spirit is attentive even if their mind may be wandering.
- Theological differences – our directees may be in a totally different place to us - and that can be difficult, especially if their concept of 'God', 'heaven' and 'hell' or 'life after death' is not bringing them growth in love, joy, peace etc [Galatians 5.22], or helping them face their diminishment in health or years.
- Parallel process – we may find that our directees are dealing with issues which are facing us as well e.g. the dying of elderly parents, sudden death of a grandchild, fading hearing, 'downsizing and de-cluttering', changes in the way we see God, our own health issues etc. Good supervision is a must.
- Our own grief when a directee dies ... it is a poignant privilege to accompany a directee in their dying. It may be that we walk with them to the end, but we may also have to be prepared to hand the primary spiritual care-giving over to others e.g. their priest / pastor if that is better for the directee.

SLIDE 8: FALLING – two images – the risk/joy and reality of falling

SLIDE 9: SPIRITUAL NEEDS IN AGEING 1# [see end page for more stories /starter questions]

- a need for meaning and purpose - 'What gives your life meaning now?' *Jesus left behind in the temple Luke 2.41-51* As Jesus discovers more of his purpose, Mary and particularly Joseph are confronted by the change in their relationship with their first born son. It is a painful time.
- a need for significant relationships
- a need to be treated with respect and kindness
- a need to allow oneself to be cared for

SLIDE 10: THE CONVERSION OF ST PAUL* – Caravaggio, 1601, St Maria de Popolo, Rome

*Accessed via internet and may be subject to copyright so please don't copy.

Spend as long as you like with this painting ... you may like to jot down some words that seem to fit ...

In Paul's story we see falling in terms of a braided river 'flood' – the unexpected encounter with the Risen Christ, an event which totally undoes Paul's sense of self, his role and purpose, his power and authority. Sudden physical dependency is compounded by the emotional encounter with Christ.

[workshop participants mentioned words like 'vulnerable', 'helpless', 'powerless', shocked ...]

SLIDE 11: HOW "FALLING" MIGHT PRESENT ITSELF IN OLDER DIRECTEES ...

- We 'lose our balance' literally or metaphorically
- We make mistakes – as a perfectionist I tried very, very hard not to make any mistakes at all – yet, we know that we can learn from our mistakes and there can be a certain relief in learning to admit we're wrong, we forgot something etc I once took the funeral of a dear friend's long-term working partner and totally forgot the second hymn – my friend was remarkably generous in her forgiveness ... but this mistake began to put a dent in my 'perfectly competent/gets everything right' self image.
- Events challenge who we are/ what we can do
- We become vulnerable
- We are invited / forced to review how we see ourselves - our role, strengths, weaknesses, how we relate to others, how we relate to God ...
- We may avoid – or welcome - change
- We may resist - or welcome – help

SLIDE 12: SAUL RECEIVING SIGHT FROM ANANIAS* – Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1769-1830

*Accessed via internet and may be subject to copyright so please don't copy.

Again spend as long as you like with this painting and with the Scripture passage below ...

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Acts 9.17

In spite of his initial fear and resistance, Ananias' relationship with God allowed him to put his own feelings aside and go to Saul. We can imagine how much of a relief it must have been for Saul to hear Ananias confirm his experience; even more moving when Ananias offers friendship to 'brother Saul' bringing healing and Holy Spirit infilling.

These paintings confront us with the dynamics of facing vulnerability and the giving and receiving of help.

SLIDE 13: REFLECTION

Take as long as you want to explore the following questions:

What is your experience of 'falling' ?

What challenges did you face? Where did you find support?

How does this 'stream' reveal itself in the lives of your directees / those around you?

SLIDES 14- 15: OPPORTUNITIES for directees to consider when in this 'FALLING' space

- Self examination through examen / daily review
- Lectio/audio/visio divina with relevant material
- Journalling / collage / drawing/ quilting / weaving etc or other creative expression
- Clinging to something 'of enduring value' e.g. holding cross, prayer beads, anchor scripture, pounamu, a sacred place, a dear friend, a piece of music, a photograph ...
- Examining the way we see God and the impact that is having ... e.g. we may feel let down or angry and disappointed that God didn't 'protect us' ...
- Practising 'receiving'
- Practising 'gratitude'
- Reaching out to others for help – this is the hardest thing for most of us as we age. The 'script' of 'not wanting to be a burden' reinforces older people's determination to stay independent but puts them at risk. In aged care centres for example residents may not want 'to bother' the staff so they attempt to take themselves to the toilet, only to fall and suffer breaks, skin tears, bruising, further loss of confidence or worse. Similarly people living alone are often reluctant to call for an ambulance, and avoid asking busy children or neighbours for assistance. Learning to ask for help before we get to old age gives us valuable skills for later life :-). In particular it is helpful if we encourage our directees to ask God for the grace they need for each aspect of life with which they may be struggling, for God is always there for us.

MUSIC:

As you spend some time listening to *ALWAYS THERE*, sung by Russell Watson on Secret Garden's CD 'Earthsongs', Track 4, you may want to reflect on your experience of God's faithfulness to you in times of struggle. Or this song may arouse anger in you if you felt God was not there for you at a time when you needed God's presence or guidance. Either way, take the time you need to bring your thoughts and feelings to God before we move on to the next 'stream'.

SLIDE 16: LETTING GO

This always reminds me of the centrepiece of the Sistine Chapel ceiling – very familiar to us all even if we've never been there. But it also reminds me of the time I had to 'let go' when my son Matt left home for university. I was full of a mother's anxiety for her only son and imagined all sorts of 'worst-case scenarios' - I even wrote about it – 'what if this was the final letting go – into the drunk driver's car, the drug dealer's snare...?' You can see the sort of state I was in .

Letting go, as we saw earlier, is the central spiritual task in the second half of life. Some people begin this task earlier through choice or circumstance but most of us struggle to detach ourselves from things/places/people which have become familiar and 'necessary' to our wellbeing, or so we think.

SLIDE 17: SPIRITUAL NEEDS IN AGEING 2#

- A need to grieve loss upon loss – again there are examples of questions and scripture to use with your directees on the last page of this set of notes
- A need for reconciliation and forgiveness
- A need to review our image of God
- A need to make sense of/transcend suffering

SLIDES 18-19: HOW 'LETTING GO' MIGHT PRESENT ITSELF IN OLDER DIRECTEES

- Deaths and 'little deaths' accumulate : retirement, role, home, health, strength, hearing, friends, family, mobility, sight, active participation, singing , favourite things ... these may come as 'floods' in and out of our lives, destroying familiar channels and reshaping our inner and outer landscape sometimes beyond recognition
- Historical griefs may surface only when a person 'stops' e.g. is hospitalised or 'put into a rest home' ... it's not uncommon to hear older women talk about pregnancy issues – abortion/babies given up for adoption - perhaps for the first time since the loss
- We can no longer do what we've always done – as we age, our 'bounce-back' decreases and even if we are in good health, things take longer to do. This may mean letting go of cherished activities/connections with other people/ways of serving/enjoyment / worshipping together
- We review our self image as the rigidity of our ego 'container' begins to soften and the edges expand [like the erodible borders of the braided river]
- We may be relieved to give up old patterns of life that no longer 'fit'
- We experience personal suffering perhaps for first time
- Old ways of looking at God may cease to satisfy

- We want reconciliation with those estranged
- We may want to offer or ask for forgiveness
- We may want to use our time differently e.g. to work more intentionally for issues of justice
- We need to discern what is ours to do – we move from being able to do many things to having to discern what to do and what not to do - JESUS followed that path of doing what he knew was his to do and his alone... and it led him to the Garden of Gethsemane

SLIDE 20: JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE – Walter Rane

*Accessed via internet and may be subject to copyright so please don't copy.

Take as long as you want to reflect on this painting of Jesus – allow yourself to enter the familiar story with new vision and openness and see what comes to mind, how you feel, what you sense of his passion.

SLIDE 21: THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

- Jesus chooses the way of 'kenosis' – self-renunciation – 'not my way' ... the consequences in human terms are that he experiences extreme anxiety, inner turmoil, the weakness of 'supportive friends', betrayal, public humiliation, physical and emotional suffering ...

For some, reflecting on the passion may produce a deeper appreciation of the scale of the spiritual suffering Jesus experienced on the cross – the Love, Word and Wisdom of God absorbing the suffering and evil of the world.

SLIDE 22: THE CRUCIFIXION

This painting of The Crucifixion by Matthias Grunewald was painted in 1512-1516. Made for a hospital which specialised in caring for those with plague, the image of the crucified Christ is pitted with plague-type sores, showing patients that Jesus understood and shared their afflictions.

For many older people, the humanity of Jesus makes sense and is a significant factor in shifting their image of God from punitive overseer to faithful companion in their weakness.

SLIDE 23:

- '... the primary healing task is to enable suffering, dying people to know that God has not abandoned them ... The presence of Jesus with us in suffering is not simply a passive solidarity in the midst of trials and tribulations
- ... the theology of the cross is comfortable with acknowledging the situation as it is: death is death, and suffering is suffering.
- The comfort and consolation of the theology of the cross comes not from naïve optimism or malignant stoicism, but from the knowledge that where there is suffering, there is God. And where God is, there is hope of redemption.'

[John Swinton and Richard Payne, editors, *Living well and dying faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care*, Eerdmans:U.K., 2009, pp.126-7]

It may be hard to speak of death when our western culture is so death-denying, but the stories of Jesus provide us with a way in for those who value the Christian tradition. For those whose language finds other metaphors useful, then we go with those ... sometimes it's easier for us too, to approach talking about death and dying via a metaphor e.g. 'nearing the end of the road'. One old man, who used to work for the railways, spoke about waiting on the platform as he got weaker and nearer death. When gently asked what that was like, he spoke of the pleasure he got from seeing the trains coming and going, the people getting on and off. He was sure his wife would be on the train that was going to 'take him to heaven'

SLIDE 24: REFLECTION

Take as long as you want to consider the following questions:

- What are you letting go of at this stage in your life?
- What /who has helped you 'let go'?
- How do you accompany those who suffer?

SLIDES 25-26 : OPPORTUNITIES for directees to consider when in this 'LETTING GO' space

- Centring prayer or other meditative practice
- Saying sorry, forgiving others and ourselves
- Praying our goodbyes [e.g. *Joyce Rupp*] - I recall an old lady who came into a rest home because at 94 her sight had failed her. She was grieving the loss of her home of 40+ years so I invited her to take her time and gently visualise each room as she remembered it, to allow memories to surface and tears to flow, to be reminded of laughter and family gatherings, and to pray her goodbye in whatever way seemed right. This took a few weeks but proved to be of value in her adjustment to rest home life.
- Letting go of unhelpful images of God
- Learning to say 'no' without guilt
- Honing discernment – deeper listening to Spirit ...
- Passing things on *now* – we all have special things which connect us with an event or a place or person. I had a poster of an eagle owl which I'd bought after a 'peak experience' in England when I'd unexpectedly had the chance to hold out my well-protected arm so an eagle owl could swoop down from a barn 80 metres away and rise and land on my arm, as lightly as a dream, to get his food. A friend had a 14yr old niece who loved owls and so recently I gave her the poster. It gladdened her heart and reduced my 'stuff' by 0.000001%!!!
- Honouring our tears ... learning to lament – psalms of lament help us to negotiate the threefold dynamic of orientation/disorientation/reorientation [Bruegemann] within a sturdy framework of plea and praise. Familiarising directees with appropriate psalms [e.g. Psalms 13, 64, 74 and 80 as suggested by Bradbury ²] and/or inviting them to write their own psalm of lament can be healing.

² Paul Bradbury, *Sowing in tears: How to Lament in a Church of Praise*, Grove Books, Cambridge, 2007, p.17

- Accepting our frailty/shadow/limitations ... we engage in soul searching, in letting go cherished ideas about ourselves and allowing the ‘not so nice’ aspects of our personalities – our greed or laziness for example – to be brought into the light of Christ’s love for us and his promise of redemption.
- Making a pilgrimage
- Choosing simplicity

MUSIC:

As you listen to *ALEXANDRA LEAVING* by Leonard Cohen, be alert for the mood, the lyrics, the story. As in all good poetry there are layers of meaning ... take what time you need to notice how this affects you.

SLIDE 27: UN*KNOWING

In case you’re wondering, we’re not going into detail about ‘the Cloud of unknowing,’ a classic of contemplative prayer. Rather we’ll explore what knowing and un*knowing look like at this stage of the spiritual journey.

SLIDE 28:

- We set aside our need for information, for certainty, for clarity in all our comings and goings. Instead of the familiar focus of the rational we befriend mystery, focusing our attention on the primary relationship – our relationship with the One from whom we came and to whom we shall return. As we are drawn into union, into ‘Oneing’ as Julian would say ...or as river channels flow - into confluence ... we begin to embrace ourselves and others with wisdom and compassion

Before the postmodern period, ‘Knowing’ was understood as something we tried to do objectively – being able to learn about something from the outside as it were, without bringing our particular experience or viewpoint into play. But it’s become clear that we all bring something of ourselves to whatever we seek to know or do – and this includes spiritual direction. It’s how we bring that self that matters.

SLIDE 29: TOM WRIGHT

- ‘What we are called to, and what in the resurrection we are equipped for, is a knowing in which we are involved as subjects but as self-giving, not as self-seeking, subjects: in other words, a knowing that is a form of love ... in the resurrection one is given the beginning of a new knowing ... a new coming to speech, the Word born afresh...’³

SLIDE 30: ADAM AND EVE

- ‘Adam *knew* [yada] his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain...’ [GEN.–4.1: KJV] - this is not just about sexual relationships. ‘Yada’ means dedicating ourselves to a person so we can engage them

³ N.T.Wright, *Surprised by hope*, SPCK, 2007, pp251-2

with our love and affection. That's what we do in spiritual direction within the safety net of personal prayer and reflection and good supervision, and with the focus firmly on the wellbeing of the directee.

- So we come with our story, the directee comes with his or her story and we meet within the story of God – which is written in love, for love, by Love.

SLIDE 31 : YOUR STORY ... MY STORY ... GOD'S STORY

Well I'm the one in the wetsuit – about to get into the sea to swim with Hector's dolphins at Akaroa ... What you can't know from the picture is that the water was only 10degC - we'd been promised drysuits but they'd been sent back to Canada for repair because they leaked, so we were in wetsuits instead! What you also can't see is that I'd been given a lovely gift which enabled me to fulfil this dream. Nor can you know the ongoing anxiety and episodes of depression that I've hidden behind a screen of competence for decades.

When we work with someone in spiritual direction we know only part of their story. Over time the harder parts of a person's life may seep into the spiritual direction session, but there may be some things that are kept private – perhaps through shame or minimising how hard things were, as in my case. As directors we can only work with what we 'know' and what the Spirit may help us sense when we meet with someone month after month. The more of themselves a directee is prepared to 'own', the more of themselves they can bring to God.

SLIDE 32: SPIRITUAL NEEDS IN AGEING - 3# [see last page for scripture and questions]

- a need to surrender more of our self to the 'more' of God, allowing ourselves to be drawn ever deeper towards 'union'
- a need to live in the present moment
- a need to prepare for death
- a need for hope

SLIDES 33-34: UN*KNOWING ... what may happen?

- We review our lives and learn to look with kindness on our younger selves and those we have loved and served
- There may be relief in not having to know the answers ... ask a child to do the technological stuff!
- We ponder our legacy – what do we want others to know about us after we die? What do we do with those journals we've been keeping for years, those collections of sermons we've written, the close-held secrets of skeletons in the family cupboard ?
- We come to terms with never knowing how the lives of those we love or the work we have done will unfold. Those of us in chaplaincy, especially hospital chaplaincy, will be used to the reality of a visit with deep conversation and intense encounter, and the person discharged before we see them again.

- We allow Love to carry us without knowing what lies ahead...
- Paradox and mystery settle more easily in our soul
- 'both/and' instead of 'either/or' allows us to expand the way we engage with others and see the divine
- We feel a 'bright sadness and sober happiness' [Rohr] – there's a poignancy and a truth in this phrase that allows us, in spite of media reports of so much wrong with the way the world is going, in spite of our own struggles, to rest in the mercy of the Great Compassion
- We may embrace the apophatic path more fully, although the blessings of the kataphatic are never far away
- The 'cloud of unknowing' resonates at many levels

SLIDE 35:

Following a retreat I drew this in an attempt to represent 'union' – something about energy, light, infusion, movement, warmth, trinity and me .

Feel free to reflect on this drawing if it is of use to you.

SLIDE 36: REFLECTION

Take time to ponder these questions:

- Where are you on the journey towards union?
- What sort of 'un*knowing' touches a chord with you at the moment?
- How does this 'stream' reveal itself in the lives of your directees / those around you?

SLIDES 37-38: OPPORTUNITIES for directees to consider when in this 'UN*KNOWING' space

- Reminiscence – intentional reflection and conversation around key life themes is a bit like the gathering of the waters to form the lagoon [hapua] which flows to the 'sea' . It is a process which can be used with people with dementia or those whose mental functioning is less impaired. Elizabeth MacKinlay & Corinne Trevitt's material includes details of both the process and the content which covers key spiritual needs such as meaning, hope, spiritual expression etc⁴
- Creatively sharing something of our life story – writing a memoir, making a quilt or video or a scrapbook, putting our favourite 'secret recipe' on the service sheet for our funeral !
- Giving our blessing carries great meaning yet is not something commonly practiced. We may conscientiously make a will, but neglect a golden opportunity to pass on something that carries more life and meaning than material assets, no matter how attractive such a legacy might be. Our blessing may be in the form of a letter, a special conversation, physical touch, sharing a song or a meal ...

⁴ Elizabeth MacKinlay & Corinne Trevitt, *Facilitating Spiritual Reminiscence for People with Dementia*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Philadelphia, 2015

whatever 'fits' those involved. The focus of the blessing is on the relationship, the precious nature of family ties, the value of the human individual in the eyes of someone about to leave this earthly life.

- Preparing for our death – if we have been attending to the 'letting go' opportunities and deepening our spiritual life, we may be able to approach our death with grace and quiet confidence in the mercy and provision of God. That's not to say there won't be times of regret, grief or anxiety, especially if there is pain in the parting. In preparation we may make an effort to say goodbye, to draw the curtains gently on our active life and allow the dying process to unfold. We may want to plan our funeral or at least give our family/friends some idea of what seems to fit for us.
- Living in the RIGHT NOW – this is especially important for those with dementia for whom the RIGHT NOW is their only focus. If we can be present to them in that moment it will indeed be a sacrament and may bring them joy, however momentary that might be. As the time ahead of us shortens, the present becomes the natural place to be, a little like a young child whose fascination with what is in front of his nose reveals the truth of human nature as contemplative.
- Loving , loving, loving ...
- Deepening centring prayer / meditation
- Contemplative seeing – creation, beauty, art
- Listening to / making music and poetry ...
- Embracing silence and solitude
- Living 'Resurrection' and the 'hope of heaven'
- Opening to the 'I AM' ... to the Cosmic Christ ... the broadening, expansive vision of Christ who is all in all.

SLIDE 39: PICTURE OF THE HAPUA AND EPHEMERAL OUTLET

- 'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

[Deuteronomy 33.27a]

- For all that has been -Thanks. For all that shall be - Yes!

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

- 'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well' [Julian of Norwich]

SLIDE 40 : SINGING TOGETHER TO THE TUNE 'ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT...'

Row, swim, float with God

towards the Sacred Sea.

Lovingly, joyfully,

peacefully, trustingly ...

embracing what shall be.

Spiritual direction conversations help people reflect on their life and address *spiritual needs*, deep longings which, *if fulfilled*, enable people to live true to their uniqueness as beings made in the image of God.⁵ A list of spiritual needs, initial questions and scripture for use in spiritual direction with those who are ageing, follows:

1. **a need for meaning and purpose** as ‘productivity’ declines, earlier life roles recede, and the familiar patterns of health, social life, housing, mobility and communication are deconstructed
“What gives your life meaning now?” *Jesus left behind and found in the temple: Luke 2.41-51*
2. **a need for significant relationships** as old connections disappear, peers die and the distance that can so often separate family members compromises contact
“Who is important to you at this stage of your life?” *Jesus, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus: John 11.1-6*
3. **a need to grieve loss upon loss**, some new and raw, others hitherto unspoken or historical
“How do you grieve when you lose someone or something you love?” *Jesus wept: John 11.17-37*
4. **a need for reconciliation and forgiveness**, for putting things right, for reconnecting with estranged family or friends, for coming to terms with one’s own failures and weakness
“How does forgiveness figure in your life?” *Jesus restores Simon Peter: John 21.9-17*
5. **a need to be treated with respect and kindness**, an honouring of personal uniqueness
“How are you treated by those around you?” *Jesus calls the children: Luke 18.15-17*
6. **a need to allow oneself to be cared for**, to face growing dependency with grace
“How hard is it for you to let someone help you?” *Jesus and the anointing at Bethany: Mark 14.3-9;*

⁵. Nursing researchers Judith Shelly & Sharon Fish, [*Spiritual Care: the nurse’s role*, [3rd ed.] IVP: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988] identified the need for forgiveness, the need for relationship, and the need to find meaning and purpose in one’s life. Other researchers have added to this list as more understanding is reached about the pivotal place of spiritual wellbeing at all stages of our lives e.g. Elizabeth MacKinlay, *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London, UK, 2006 and Harold G. Koenig, *Spirituality in Patient Care [2nd Ed.]* Templeton Foundation Press: London, 2007

7. **a need to prepare for death**, to express feelings and move towards a place of inner peace
 “What have you already done to prepare for your death?” “What might you want to do?”
The infant Jesus in Simeon’s arms: Luke 2.25-33; Jesus at the last supper - the foot-washing: John 13.3-15

8. **a need to strengthen inner resources**, e.g. prayer, reflection , engagement with arts and music
 “How are you strengthened in your inner self?” “What gives you joy?” *Jesus praying: Luke 6.12*

9. **a need to review one’s image of God**, being prepared to face doubt and disappointment so a new way of seeing God may emerge from the rubble of broken expectations and trauma
 “How would you describe the God you believe/don’t believe in now?”
Jesus as shepherd: John 10.1-16; Jesus as ‘mother hen’: Matthew 23.37

10. **a need to make sense of / transcend suffering**, to find a way of integrating emotional or physical pain into a metaphor or theme that can link their personal narrative with a bigger story
 “What helps you cope with pain and suffering?” *Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane: Matt. 26.36-46*

11. **a need to let go of control** and, for the faithful, to trust oneself to the grace and mercy of God
 “What are you letting go of as you age?” *Jesus on the cross – the ultimate letting go: Luke 23:39-46*

12. **a need for hope** – in the midst of grief and loss, in the face of death, there can still be hope, whether that is through e.g. a strengthening faith and belief in the teachings of Christ, or the assurance of physical comfort and companioned dying
 “What do you hope for as you get closer to the end of your life?”
Jesus shepherd in life and in death: Psalm 23; Nothing can separate us from God: Romans 8.38-39