



### Helping an unwell person for the first time

In my work as a pastoral carer, approaching a new hospital patient, travelling from bed to bed in the wards can be a little daunting. The patient may be too sick to converse, or simply may not want to talk to anyone at that point. Some may not know what a "pastoral carer" is, and they are therefore very wary, or some may feel threatened at the idea of talking about spiritual matters or being "preached to" by an unknown pastor. As a carer, it is up to me to meet the person where they are - accepting them and their decision, whatever it might be, at that moment in time.

#### General conversation

Early conversation with those who respond may be about the mundane while we each take the measure of each other, building up rapport and trust. Some conversations may simply stay at the superficial level, and that is ok. I have made contact, I have offered my presence and listening ear if they wish to use that service. I use my initiative to end the conversation based on their verbal content and body language.

#### Spiritual conversation

In contrast, other conversations can lead quickly to spiritual matters. Some statements are very easy - e.g. "I would welcome your prayer for me" or "I had a lovely visit from someone in my church the other day." This tells me that they have a spiritual life and are willing to share. For others I have to listen carefully to clues in their words to see if they are open to discuss a spiritual matter. Other statements which are more ambiguous may need gentle and careful reflection from me, e.g. the statement "I don't think I want to do this anymore" or "I think this is the end of the road for me." At this stage I see this as an opening for deeper communication, also being acutely aware that I am privileged to be the recipient in such a conversation. The slow speed at which they talk and the pauses in their conversation can be a clue that they are thinking about something carefully and they are weighing up how open to be with me.

My open posture, warmth in manner, being prepared to listen and not to rush in to speak are all very important skills in the conversation. Reflecting emotion and their verbal content are crucial listening skills, followed by more exploratory questions as the relationship develops. It is important to not have "my own agenda" in the conversation e.g. thinking about what I am going to say next while they are speaking and deciding in my mind where the conversation might head.

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### Give ... and receive

Being a pastoral carer is about giving up your time totally for the person you are visiting, and it is a precious gift to give and to receive. I have found that in my best pastoral care conversations concerning spiritual matters I have also received benefits and insights to my own faith.

Louise Buttsworth

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