



My Work

By **David Buck** - Spiritual Care Co-ordinator,
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I have been a hospice chaplain (spiritual care co-ordinator) for eight years. Before that I worked for a year as a Church of England chaplain in an acute hospital. Prior to that I was a Church of England minister (vicar) for 10 years and, before that, I worked in classical music as a musician and teacher.

My career, I suppose, has always been a mixture of what interests me and what opportunities open up that have led me to places. Hospice work interests me because it gets to grips with what really, really matters.

I help the hospice understand what spiritual, pastoral and religious care is and how it is delivered. I work directly with patients, families and carers at the hospice on the inpatient unit, in the day therapy unit and in the community (at home).

This work is broad in its content, though will often touch on the most difficult aspects of people's lives. It is largely concerned with the non-physical stuff - identity, meaning, truth, relationships and, what I might call, wonder. Sometimes there are issues of fear. A particular kind of listening, genuine listening that doesn't necessarily respond by trying to fix things. Empathy is crucial. Sometimes what matters most to people is being listened to. I also support staff in their work, being a training resource in pastoral, spiritual and religious care and through offering staff psychological, emotional and spiritual support (usually one-to-one).

Sometimes it is important to support family members separately. Often it is helpful for a patient to know that there is someone outside the family to talk to about important things that they do not wish to burden their family with. We the bereaved family and friends of loved ones.

I think that matters of faith for some people do come more to the fore and become more important as people near death. Much of my work is done supporting people of faith, and those with no faith, as they ask questions and think through various issues focused by nearing death. Often this support seems to offer more peace than the various forms of medication on offer.

Faith and belief can be important aspects of people's lives, though this is becoming increasingly less so. My approach is tailored to trying to find out whether matters of faith and belief are important to an individual, to listen, build a healthy working relationship and see where that goes. Sometimes my expertise is limited, so I seek advice and support from other faith specialists. The searching questions that people ask are not always related to traditional avenues of faith and belief. Concepts of faith and belief are changing, though no less spiritual. People of no faith will often have pastoral needs that can be met by a chaplain.

Although in the past, when I was a vicar, I worked very closely with funeral directors, in my current role this is much less so. Funeral

directors work with the dead and the living. I work only with the living. In working with the living I have found it helpful to live by what is known by many faith and belief groups and non-faith groups to be the 'Golden Rule' - treat others how you would want to be treated. To this I would add to bear in mind the importance of proper listening.

A lot has happened in the past few weeks and things change several times a week, if not daily. The hospice is coping very well in the circumstances, and the two hospices in Leeds - St Gemma's and Wheatfields - have set up

a COVID-19 support helpline. We adapt and change and continue to offer high quality care. My own particular role has changed in that it is much more focused on issues of staff support. However, the future may well see much more of my time on bereavement. Visiting patients has been much reduced, and attendance at funerals for some has not been possible. The knock-on effects are bound to be significant.

I write poetry and reflections from our hospice staff, and thought these two recent ones might be of interest to *Funeral Director Monthly* readers."

A reflection on caring during COVID-19 - By David Buck

"Reach out to those you fear. Touch the heart of complexity. Imagine beyond what is seen. Risk vulnerability one step at a time."

John Paul Lederach.

Lament

By David Buck

*I just want to hold her hand
and to have her hold mine
but our world will not allow it,
disease separates.
If I could be there I could do
and love and speak for her
among strangers who will miss
the little, important things.
And not because they don't care,
hell no, they do, but this is no way
to end your days,
our days, discovered too late, alone.
I hear no talk of God but
in the silence. That God
has abandoned us again,
left us, to be alone, un-held.*

The above "mantra" is found in the concluding pages of Lederach's book, *The Moral Imagination: The art and soul of building peace* (Open University Press - 2005). I've often found it helpful when wondering what to do in tricky situations. Lederach is an expert on peacebuilding and reconciliation. At first thought it might seem that his words do not fit neatly into our hospice context, but I'd like to try.

Reach out to those you fear. Well, I think that this is in our genes, and at the heart of all that we do; we do this almost without thinking about it. We respond and reach out with empathy in care and compassion to all. It is one of the wonderful things that we do at Wheatfield's and we do it well. And in these unprecedented times, faced with the threats of Covid-19, there is stuff to fear. There may be situations and people that we fear. So what do we do?

Lederach would encourage us not necessarily to sort it all out but simply to see the mess for what it is. We don't need to make friends with it but it is helpful to acknowledge that it is there. But then what? Imagine beyond what is seen. Key to moving on, Lederach

argues, is the creative imagination. These organic moments that seem, sometimes, to come from nowhere - but can be transformative.

We see how we want things to be, how they can be, and see a pathway that gets us there. Maybe we come up with something new, or we just try the same old thing but at the right moment and something special just happens. We arrive at a future that most people dared not imagine but someone did. Sounds exciting, but... Risk vulnerability one step at a time - To move forward, to address our fears, to explore uncharted territory can be risky. We are human after all. We are vulnerable. Creative imagination, exciting as it is, is partly about sticking your head above the parapet and seeing what happens. We might take calculated risks, compromise or do the best we can in the circumstances but to do all these at once may not be wise.

Lederach's work is about peacebuilding and reconciliation in warzones in some of the most troubled places in the world. I think that there are parallels with our situation as we seek to make peace and reconciliation within ourselves and in our work during an extraordinary pandemic.