

The Healing of Preparing for a Good Death

Report by The Revd Dr Jason Phillips

I recently attended a conference at Westcott House in Cambridge on 'death and dying' led by Dr Sioned Evans and The Revd Dr Andrew Davison. The conference focussed much upon palliative care and preparing a person for their death in the Christian tradition. Of course each person's life story is unique and so too the responses to their illness and response to their dying. Dr Evans emphasised that hospice palliative care is about helping people to live until they die. Part of that helping to live Dr Evans summarized in ten defining principles:

- To know when death is coming and to understand what can be expected;
- To be able to retain control of what happens;
- To afford dignity and privacy;
- To have control and choice over where death occurs (at home or elsewhere);
- To have access to information and expertise of whatever kind is necessary;
- To have access to any spiritual or emotional support required;
- To have access to hospital care in any location, not only hospital;
- To have control over who is present and who shares the end;
- To be able to issue advance directives which ensures wishes are respected;
- To have time to say goodbye and control over other aspects of timing;
- To be able to leave when it is time to go and not to have life prolonged pointlessly.

The Christian tradition offers much in support of these principles and affirms them completely. Fundamental to these principles are the Christian sacraments of healing, communion and reconciliation.

Healing comes in many ways: in forgiveness both giving and receiving, in reconciling with loved ones and God, and in communion with God, with family and with other Christians. Each sacrament shrouded in prayer and blessing, enables a goodbye and a preparation for that which is to come that is moving into the arms of God in death. The healing properties of the sacraments in the dying person's life enables them to live until they die.

As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil,
so may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of
the Holy Spirit.

Of his great mercy
may he forgive you your sins
and release you from suffering.
May he deliver you from all evil,
preserve you in all goodness
and bring you to everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Books

Care for the Dying: A Practical and Pastoral Guide
by Sioned Evans and Andrew Davison (2013)

Why Sacraments?
by Andrew Davison (2013)

**"You have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you"
St Augustine of Hippo**

