

Minutes of the Annual Medical Service

Held on Wednesday 8th May 2019

The 2019 NHS service was held in the Lady Chapel of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral at 6.30pm on Wednesday 8th May with the Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Merseyside in gracious attendance. The theme was "Restoring Faith."

The service was led by the Vice Dean, Canon Myles Davies, and accompanied by the Cathedral Youth Choir. The service was introduced by the President of the Liverpool Medical Institution, Dr John Curtis, who also gave the New Testament reading, Hebrews 11:1-16. The Old Testament reading, Psalm 23, was given by Professor Hazel Scott Dean of the School of Medicine, University of Liverpool.

The first reflection was given by Mrs Helen Bray and came from a patient's perspective. When diagnosed with breast cancer two years earlier her question was not "Why me?" but "Why not me?" One in eight of the female population suffers from breast or bone cancer at some point during their lives. As a Christian she was confident that God had his hand on her in every season, providing healing and protection, and she had confidence in Jesus's promise to be with his followers.

After being prayed over and anointed by fellow Christians she was gratified to learn that she was declared cancer free and plans were made for ten years of prescription drugs but no Chemotherapy. (She was grateful she did not have to collect them all at the same time!) She suggested we could give thanks to God for the NHS and pray for sufficient provision of workers and resources and we could also give thanks to God for giving us life and live that life to the full in Jesus.

The second reflection was given by Mike Eastwood, a member of the management board of the Royal Liverpool and Broad Green Hospitals and current acting chair.

Mike argued that God gives extra chances, even though in some circumstances institutions could not. He urged us to use scripture rightly, pointing out that when Jesus was in the wilderness the devil used scripture in his effort to tempt him, yet it was different words from the same scripture that Jesus used in his rebuff of Satan.

Mike emphasised the power of storytelling pointing out how people like to hear and to tell their own story. He suggested that the fifth gospel after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John could be our own gospel, i.e. our own spiritual story.

Hospitals and churches have in common that neither turn people away. But there is a paradox in that while our hospitals are full to overflowing our churches are not.

Finally, it was important that we maintained institutions, be they hospital or Churches, to provide care, support and healing to all according to need.

The address was given by Professor Anne Garden, formerly Consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Liverpool Women's hospital and Director of the Centre for Medical Education, Lancaster Medical School.

She talked of a study which showed that always seeing the same family doctor cuts the risk of dying early by up to 53%. Perhaps having faith in a doctor is good for you. Another study showed that church attendance increases life expectancy. If religious faith could be packaged into a pill the stock price of companies would soar.

But what is faith? Anne maintained that it is trust in God which is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living.

So, if faith in health professionals and a religious faith make a difference to our own health, what difference does faith have on our lives as health professionals?

It means that we can know that God is interested in our work and that we can trust in Him irrespective of what is happening. The 23rd Psalm reminds us that He is our Shepherd, in charge and caring for us. Working in health care is tough but we can be confident that He leads us through those difficult times. In her own experience Anne had found the leading of the Good Shepherd almost miraculous when the world seemed closed against her.

We can look at our care in different ways. At the heart of the Christian faith is the belief that all humans are equal and have inherent dignity and value as all are made in the image of God. Christians have got into trouble with sharing their faith at work. But if we treat those under our care in a way that recognises that they are made in the image of God it will get noticed and will lead to patients asking what this is all about.

It means we can trust God in every situation. Life in the world of health care is tough, but whether those tough times are thrust upon us or whether they are of our own making we can be sure that the Lord remains our Shepherd and will lead us through. He will never give up on us, but encourages us to go on living our lives as Christian health professionals to His glory.

The prayers were led by Fr Stephen Lee, Roman Catholic Chaplain to the Royal and the blessing given by Canon Davies.

Peter Davies