

# A nurse on the parochial team

Sarah Mullally on the rationale for going down this path

**Rediscovering a Ministry of Health: Parish nursing as a mission of the local church**  
Helen Anne Wordsworth  
Wipf & Stock £16  
(978-1-4982-0595-5)

I SHOULD declare an interest in this book and topic. During my time as Chief Nursing Officer, under a previous government, I met Helen Wordsworth as she set out to explore parish nursing in the UK. I was struck by the challenge that lay in front of her: to gain support not only within the Church, but also within the National Health Service, would require her to gain the confidence of both healthcare professionals and people in church leadership.

Some 12 years later, this book demonstrates that Wordsworth understands what it takes to introduce a new initiative. The book seeks to provide a theological rationale and demonstrate the practical worth of parish nursing to the mission of the Church.

Parish nursing ministry commenced in the UK in November 2003, and it involves the appointment of a registered nurse as part of the church ministry team's developing a whole-person health programme with both congregation and community.

The book covers theological literature on the mission of the local church and of parish nursing in the United States. It describes the qualitative study of 15 churches that have parish nurses and a control group of 77 other churches.

I was struck by the findings, which suggested that the mission of the Church was enhanced by parish

nursing in three main ways. There was increased contact with non-churchgoers; volunteering by the churches around the health initiative increased; and the range of missional activities undertaken was broadened, not just in the realm of physical health, but across the board, in mental-health, community-health, and spiritual-health interventions. It also required church leaders to engage with other voluntary and statutory bodies.

The book demonstrates the opportunities that are there if the Church rediscovers a ministry of wholeness, and parish nurses offer a way to do that. Parish nursing enables the Church to meet those who are not churchgoers. It is about building relationships, and building the Kingdom of God.

The book provides the evidence that the NHS demands and that the Church should listen to. Parish nursing is not a simple way for churches to re-engage with health ministry. Parish Nursing Ministry UK has, however, done much of the hard work.

Wordsworth's vision of having at least one parish nurse alongside, and as a complement to, health care in every large village, town, or district is achievable because of the sustainable support structure that has been put in place by Parish Nursing UK.

I would recommend this book to church leaders seeking to engage with their non-church community, as well as to nurses who have heard God's call on their lives, and to those in the NHS who are seeking to engage with the voluntary sector.

As Wordsworth suggests, parish nursing not only offers a way of engaging in the work of God, but helps to build a society that allows people to discover purpose for living, that offers choice, and that makes it possible for lives to be transformed.

*The Rt Revd Sarah Mullally is the Bishop of Crediton.*



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Evocative: this photo of footprints in sand by Joe Drivas is one of the Getty images used in *Strength for the Journey*, edited by Helen J. Bate and Michelle Forster, a book in a series to help people in the middle to later stages of dementia. Large pictures have been chosen to evoke memories, accompanied by simple, large-print text. The themes here are all to do with the spiritual side of life, from thankfulness and love to the Lord's Prayer, "the old rugged cross", and the breaking of bread (Pictures to Share, £20; 978-0-9563818-8-0). A 48-page carers' book, *Too Late to Learn to Drive: Dementia, visual perception and the meaning of pictures*, by Helen J. Bate, is also available free of charge (but send £3 p&p) from [www.picturestoshare.co.uk](http://www.picturestoshare.co.uk), which offers discounts for the full series

## Making the last great journey

David Bryant finds a hospice chaplain's reflections supportive

**Voices from the Hospice: Staying with life through suffering and waiting**  
Bob Whorton  
SCM Press £16.99  
(978-0-334-05426-9)  
CT Bookshop special price £14.45

BOB WHARTON has written this book from nine years of experience as a hospice chaplain. He views life as a train journey in which the stations represent the different stages that we pass through on the way to death.

The voyage unfolds like a tapestry, interweaving his own insights in with those of the hospice patients and their friends and

families. These reflections are interspersed with comments on extracts from the Psalms which often duplicate the worries and concerns of the dying and their carers. His pastoral sensitivity and compassion shine out from the pages of the book. He shows with great perspicacity that the experiences of pain, fear, and drug-taking are not all loss, but are stages on life's path which can bring us close to God.

He sees approaching death as a space where something new can grow, a dimension of life through which we can mature spiritually. This throws a new and imaginative light on time spent in the hospice, turning it into a pilgrimage. There is a lucidity and gentleness in his writing. This book will be helpful to priests and lay people visiting the terminally ill, and will bring consolation and fresh hope to those embarking on the last great journey.

Whorton is not afraid to confront atheism, and he puts forward an

existentialist view of life which is refreshing and relevant. He speaks of the dark night of the soul, and with great openness shows how it is often necessary for our old images of God to die before we can find him in his fullness. This is a courageous theology to put forward. I guess that many readers will thank him for it and find their own spiritual lives renewed.

The whole thrust of the book is positive. Time and again, the author sees loss, anger, and failure as a seedbed from which new life can spring. Ultimately, peace comes when we "let go" and allow God to begin his work of restoration and to bring about peace and wholeness.

I particularly liked chapter nine, "The Breaking of God". We have to be prepared to "stare into the darkness of a random world in which we have to create our own meaning". Only when we break our old images of God can we discover him afresh. What we discover is overwhelming love.

Whorton not only shows us how to find "the courage to be" when facing death: he recreates a vision of God as co-suffering and compassionate. Facing terminal cancer, I found this book to be full of comfort, hope, prayerfulness, and a profound love of God. Thank you, Bob Whorton.

*The Revd David Bryant is a retired priest living in Yorkshire.*

## Motivated by Christ's love

**The Golden Thread: A quiet revolution in holistic cancer care**  
Pat Pilkington  
Vala £10  
(978-1-908363-12-1)

THE Bristol Cancer Help Centre has supported hundreds of people facing terminal illness. It does not claim to cure, but instead offers healing in the widest sense. For many years, its pioneering holistic work has been championed and supported by Prince Charles.

The late Pat Pilkington was one of the centre's co-founders, together with Penny Brohn, from whom the centre now takes its name. *The Golden Thread* tells the history of the project over 30 years, and charts her own spiritual journey, which both inspired the work and was influenced by it.

Pat and her husband, Christopher, became interested in the Church's healing ministry through their friendship with a fellow clergy couple, Tim and Mystica Tiley. Mr

Tiley told them about a vivid experience that he had had as a boy when he had "died" and visited heaven, only to return to earth with the gift of healing. The book is filled with anecdotes of the extraordinary, of people who see angels, of those who have predicted their deaths, to possessions of the saints, out-of-body sensations, and moving deathbed scenes.

The spiritual journey that the author describes, in a book written shortly before her death, tells of her

reconciliation of Christian teaching and Anglican tradition with New Age ideas. She sees no contradiction in her understanding of the love of Christ with much New Age mysticism.

She is open-minded about notions of the afterlife which have echoes of Spiritualism. She cites Gnosticism and quotes from the *Gospel of Thomas*. She blames St Paul for turning the Jesus who brought the good news of transcendence through divine love into

the figure of judgement at the heart of a theology of sin, guilt, and damnation.

Her personal shedding of Christian orthodoxy to discover a new depth to her Christian life is one side of the story. The other side concerns the practical struggle that she, Penny Brohn, and their team faced to realise their vision, of pioneering new ways to help those with diagnosed cancer. Pilkington describes both the successes and the setbacks on the way. The most serious was the publication of a medical report, damning their results, which received huge publicity. The later apologies for methodological flaws and retraction received far less media interest.

Today, the centre that Pilkington helped to found has long since recovered its reputation, has largely overcome the suspicions of the medical establishment, and is a world leader in its field.

*Ted Harrison is a former BBC religious-affairs correspondent.*



Receiving her MBE: Pat Pilkington with her husband, Christopher, in a photo from the book

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