

How much do we care?

This has not been a good few weeks for what we call “the care sector”. Firstly there were the financial concerns at Southern Cross Care Homes which includes one of the newest care homes in Portishead. Were the elderly residents about to be made homeless? We are assured not but nobody has yet indicated how this financial crisis may impact on the long term quality of care offered such as staffing levels and the proper maintenance of buildings and equipment. Then there were the horrific images of abuse at the Winterbourne View Hospital, which were so shocking that I could only glimpse before needing to turn away. And the very real fear, where else might this be happening?

It is easy to criticise those who seek to make money out of the care sector or stand in judgement over those who fail in their duty of care but how much do we really care – not just say we care, but deep down really care?

The reality is that families with children with complex needs have been struggling for years to get proper support and help. If things are difficult whilst their children are of school age it becomes even harder once they reach adulthood. Similarly it has been widely acknowledged for years that there is a growing crisis about the extent and quality of care provision for the elderly, but no government has really faced up to it as the solutions are just too expensive. Care workers remain some of the lowest paid workers in the country. The only way these areas can be properly resourced is by us paying more taxes or accepting other services we value may need to receive less funding for these areas to receive more. Sadly it is all too easy to ignore the needs of those with special needs or in care homes until there is a crisis. We prefer not to think about such matters unless we have to

I believe the real quality of any group or society can best be judged by the way it treats the most vulnerable in its midst. This is true of the Church too. This is why Chris Judson’s ministry as our Team Pastor is so important although I know she wants to stress that pastoral care is the duty and care of us all. Since the ministry of Jesus, the Church has always had a bias to the poor, the vulnerable, the lonely and those in need.

As a society it is time to ensure that the elderly and vulnerable are treated with the very highest respect and dignity and receive the very best care. It is the very least we owe them to end their days in the best possible environment with the best possible care and attention; they should not be shunted to one side just because they are frail or vulnerable. It is easy to cheer such a sentiment but to achieve it will mean consequences in our nation’s budget. Are we prepared for that? In the end how much do we care?

Andy