

Article published in **The Link (Newcastle Diocesan Newspaper) May 2008**

Dementia turns 'Outside In'...

A story of how dementia is enabling a community partnership in Newcastle to grow...



The Carer's Banner (made by carers) on loan to Holy Nativity Church.
From left to right: Brian Allen, Chaplain in Mental Health; Dorothy Walker, local project team; Derek Marr, local project team; Carole Lawson, resident and carer; Jane Sivell, Newcastle Carers Centre; Andy Bowden, neighbouring parish; Barbara Quinn, Carer Support Worker; Jacqueline Rainford, resident.

When buildings become inadequate for their purpose, what should be done?

The question faced both church and local GP surgeries in Chapel House in the outer west of Newcastle. They had begun their life together in the 1960's, forming the heart-beat of a new and rapidly increasing community in what was then the largest housing estate in Europe. As new residents arrived, the surgery waiting rooms provided essential space for Sunday School until the church was built in 1972. One of the first local doctors, Tony Rainford, was later ordained and served the community as both GP and minister.

The heart of the community with its church, surgeries, schools, shops and community centre has continued to beat over the years, but time saw the growing

need for renewed community facilities. The young parents of the early years were now grandparents. The church was facing expensive maintenance bills. The doctors were living with cramped and inadequate premises. What should be done?

The Primary Care Trust suggested moving the GP's to a new regional medical centre somewhere else. The community shouted 'NO!' They shouted so loudly that the PCT heard. The church invited the PCT to work with the community to provide new facilities on site, and so began a journey of exploration and surprise.

The church hosted open meetings and audited local needs. The local schools gave their whole-hearted practical support. Local councillors and Ward Committees were keen to assist. The local authority prepared a development brief. Together we worked to clarify what was needed and how to achieve it. Three co-dependent elements were evident: body, mind, spirit. 'Personhood' gave shape to the emerging integrated project.

Insights from outside experience came to bear, not least from chaplaincy work in the deaf community, in NHS mental health, in the police and in teaching. Audits confirmed a high level of older people and also of carers. Dementia featured frequently in the stories of local people. The excellent and challenging article in Church Times 28th March, by Brian Allen: 'The loneliness of dementia', expresses well the human stories and issues which we witness in our small part of our Newcastle.

Early in 2007 the church established its own part of the project by launching **'Outside In' – Together Creating Inclusive Community**: the aim to become more versatile, accessible and sustainable as a community resource and to find ways to support those most vulnerable (and frequently the least noticed) residents, particularly those living with dementia and carers.

During 2007 events began to unfold rapidly. The church applied to the Big Lottery (Community Buildings Fund) for its 'Outside In' project. Big Lottery responded with a development grant and an invitation to apply for a capital grant. The church celebrated with a bottle of champagne.

A newcomer to church, a long-term carer, introduced us to 'Dementia Care Partnership'¹ – a Newcastle based charity she had helped to develop, forged out of the experience of carers themselves. 'Yes!' they said – Chapel House is just where we need to be! DCP has been granted 'Social Enterprise Pathfinder' status by the Department of Health. They explore and develop ways to support people with dementia and other mental illnesses to live independent lives within their communities rather than face residential care. 'Yes', we said – we need you here!

A visitor to church asked 'What's Outside In?' We explained about the project and also our hopes of finding a developer for the medical centre. 'I work for a developer', she said, 'they specialise in medical centres.' Ashley House plc called the next day, assessed the situation and registered a strong interest in being involved.

¹ Dementia Care Partnership is based in the Bradbury Centre in Brunswick Village. You are welcome to call in to their community café.

A project partnership was formed: Ashley House plc (on behalf of the local doctors and dentist), Holy Nativity Church, and Dementia Care Partnership. Our architects have worked together to plan integrated facilities on the site. The project will link health, welfare, social and community services. Two local GP surgeries, the local dentist and Dementia Care Partnership will share the health centre facilities, including a gym which will be available for residents. New supported homes for DCP clients will be customised from the old surgeries.

The land around the church, currently an open grass space, will accommodate both church community extension and DCP day support facilities. Whilst retaining independence, the church, community and DCP buildings will be linked so that they can share most facilities in a creative variety of ways.

The project will develop its support of 'Mind Matters', a West Newcastle Deanery initiative which provides a forum and safe meeting space for people facing mental health problems. As part of its call to mission and ministry, Holy Nativity will endeavour to appoint lay chaplains to befriend DCP and other community groups that meet on site.

Energy efficiency and environmental issues are high items on our agenda. The church and DCP are working with local schools to create two secure community gardens, which will be friendly to frogs and small animals and include locally indigenous plants.

A recent open week in the church invited responses from the community. 540 people completed questionnaires, every one supportive of the project. Joint planning application is being made this April. Sana Alnaimi, architect for the medical centre, comments: "I am very passionate about this project and I hope we get the positive response we all are working hard to get."

Recent research suggests that the number of people diagnosed with dementia is likely to increase 61% in the next ten years. The government has launched a National Dementia Strategy. Rani Svanberg, Chief Executive of Dementia Care Partnership observes: "From DCP's point of view we see the partnership working with the medical centre (PCT), the Holy Nativity Church, the council and the local community as crucial and very much in line with the government agenda nationally."

Mark Henderson, Regional Director of Ashley House plc, states that "Ashley House plc is a national developer of Primary Healthcare premises and is actively working to make a positive contribution to local communities. The opportunity at Chapel House is unique and provides a platform for partners to deliver a fully Integrated Community Medical Facility, from which all of Chapel House will benefit. It is wonderful to see "WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP" can work. "

Local responses to the news include:

- Dorothy Gray, resident and chair of the local Community Association: "Fantastic news – really delighted! This community needs these facilities so much"

- George of the famous local hardware shop: “ At long last ! Wonderful news for the community! Good luck with stage 2 of the Lottery bid.”
- Carole Lawson, long term carer and resident: “There is such a need for the facilities and support the project is seeking to provide. I do hope it happens.” Carole has recently helped to initiate ‘Holy Nativity Care Connexion’ group for carers and former carers.
- Anne, a retired local resident who ran the Great North Run to raise over £10,000 for the church community part of the project: “We are still running a marathon but the GNR was an encouragement to believe the project is not beyond our capabilities.”

Holy Nativity is not a large parish and the church has limited expertise and funds. However, it has a gift for hospitality, which it hopes will be put to good use in the new buildings. And in response to Brian Allen’s question: (ref. ‘Dementia’, Church Times 28th March), when Holy Nativity next needs a vicar, the request would be for someone willing to challenge the stigma associated with mental illness amongst both young and old alike.