

What is a Pilgrim Home?

Louise Morse

Last year paramedics called to Finborough Court told manager Lynne Durrant that it was unlike any other care home they had experienced. A former government minister told manager Diane Eldrett that if her mother needed care, she would unhesitatingly choose Shottermill House, and a social worker asked if she could bring an elderly aunt along to see how caring a residential home could be. All our homes have similar stories.

So what is it that makes Pilgrim Homes different? What gives each home an atmosphere so strong that visitors all comment on it? And will it be the same at Royd Court, which will operate differently to our residential care homes?

A few months ago a friend struggling with Parkinson's disease came to the end of his tether. Forced to retire early from teaching he had managed to keep up the street evangelism which was the joy of his life with the help of his friends, but had become so weak and helpless that he was afraid to stay alone at home any longer. He and his doctor thought a month's residential respite care might help get him back on his feet. At 60 he was too young for a Pilgrim Home, so I helped to arrange a place in a local Christian care home where I expected him to get the sort of 'whole person' care that he would in a Pilgrim Home. As you would expect in South Wales, the home had a warm, friendly atmosphere, but there were no uplifting texts on the walls, Bible studies or Bibles; prayer, worship, Christian literature, or grace before meals, and only occasional visits from a pastor on Sunday. The board outside said 'Christian' but inside there was nothing to show that it was a Christian home. As far as we could tell, only one other resident was a Christian and none of the staff. I was worried that this old warrior might feel out of place, but, ever quick to see God's hand in events he told me he was



Home Visitors and Home Support Group members at a special conference in March

delighted to have a captive audience ripe for evangelising. It reminded me of Sam Bentley, the resident at Evington who used to go by bus each week to the town centre, wearing sandwich boards proclaiming John 3:16, to meet up with a band of town evangelists. The difference was that Sam was supported in his faith, but I had not expected this kind of contrast between Pilgrim Homes and other ‘Christian’ homes. It was not just about practicalities, but about the *atmosphere*. The atmosphere of a place is almost as important as the air we breathe. ‘Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife,’ says Proverbs 17:1. Step through the door of any of our homes and you will find a pleasant, physical freshness and a comforting, welcoming atmosphere. The physical freshness is down to the hard work

of our efficient domestic teams, but what aspects of our homes contribute to the atmosphere?

Free to live as usual

Perhaps the most important aspect about our homes is that elderly Christians are free to be themselves. They can continue with the things that are so important to them – grace before meals, prayer and Bible studies, and so on. But although these practices may *contribute* to the atmosphere of the homes they do not explain its almost tangible quality. Practically every newcomer mentions it, Christian or not. During her last tour, Investors in People assessor Angela Smyth said how impressed she was with the ethos and ‘unique atmosphere’ of our homes. 97 year old Winifred Desmond, being lovingly cared for at home by her daughter in law

Attitudes create atmosphere, as anyone who has raised a cranky teenager can tell you.

said that if she needed to go into a home her choice is already made – she would go into the nearest Pilgrim Home because, she said, ‘You can feel the love there as soon as you step inside.’

Where does it come from, this atmosphere?

Attitudes create atmosphere, as anyone who has raised a cranky teenager can tell you. (Even from behind a closed bedroom door they can fill a whole house with it.) Atmosphere can stay when the people responsible for it have gone, as in the calm, stillness of an empty country church, or the comfort of a well-ordered family kitchen. Everyone in Pilgrim Homes unconsciously contributes to our atmosphere: trustees, directors, managers, homes’ senior care teams, and homes’ supporters. They are all committed, evangelical Christians with beliefs and attitudes that unconsciously influence everything they do and say. These attitudes are reinforced by residents in the homes, and underpinned again by the Home Support Groups, Home Visitors, and Auxiliaries. Many of our carers are not Christian, of course, but we believe God has appointed them to us and we value them highly.

Will Royd Court, operating differently to our residential care homes be the same? It will be a

community of elderly Christians from different backgrounds and denominations, but with a shared faith. They will be living in their own flats, and every flat will be ‘care-ready’, so when someone begins to need personal care they will not have to move into a ‘care wing’ as our sheltered housing residents do now – they will be able to have that care in their own home. This is called ‘domiciliary care’. In our residential care homes, local authorities contract with us to provide the accommodation and the care, and we employ the carers, but it is not the same as domiciliary care. When it funds the cost of domiciliary care for occupants of Royd Court who need it, the council will use one of their registered domiciliary care agencies (DCA). But Pilgrim Homes’ trustees and executives and Royd Court’s manager and administrator will still have the same attitudes – and so will its supporters. The loving Christian care of the Lord’s ‘aged pilgrims’ and the spiritual values that support their faith will be imparted exactly as they are now, and Royd Court, too, will have that faith-building, and special Pilgrim Homes’ atmosphere.