'Supporting Dying Children and their Families'

Paul Nash, SPCK, London 2011

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This book is a good resource for anyone involved in Christian pastoral ministry with sick and dying children and their families. Church workers and healthcare chaplains will find rich material to aid reflection on their experience of ministry, and the continuing development of their practice.

The book includes chapters on palliative and bereavement care in hospital, hospice and community; resources for theological reflection; caring for ourselves; an introduction to ethics; and guidance on conducting funerals and memorial services. At the end of each chapter points are listed for further reflection and action. There are appendices offering further resources and a good index of topics and biblical references.

My initial response to reading was one of frustration. The book is so overtly Christian! I had not read the title properly and assumed, because of the author's position as senior chaplain at Birmingham Children's Hospital, it was a book about paediatric hospital chaplaincy. It calls itself 'A Handbook for Christian Ministry' and it is in fact very much about Nash's work as a hospital chaplain, but within a context that I find very different from my own experience of paediatric hospital chaplaincy in Scotland.

This is a book which is full of wisdom and insight drawn from Nash's experience and his rigorous reflective practice. He describes clearly his own wrestling and struggle with the many personal and theological challenges of ministry among dying children and their families. He draws on the collective wisdom of his colleagues many of whom have contributed to the text from their own particular perspective. We hear from other hospital chaplains, medical and nursing colleagues, a local minister, a psychologist, a funeral director, and a complimentary therapist among others. Most importantly, this book contains many accounts by parents about the

experience of their grieving, of what helped them, and what did not help.

Although the book's main title is "Supporting dying children and their families" it focuses mostly on supporting parents, siblings and grandparents of the dying child. I would have liked to read more about Nash's work which directly supports the dying child or young person. I was disappointed that there was very little written about conducting rituals and funerals for those who do not wish to include any expression of religious belief, although Nash acknowledges this may become more of a feature of his chaplaincy team's work.

I am left with a greater awareness of my own vocation that had become somewhat buried under the business of delivering Spiritual Care and the ongoing debate about the direction that healthcare chaplaincy is taking in Scotland. Perhaps what is needed now is a complimentary volume on the challenges of theological and vocational integrity for healthcare chaplains in our Scottish context.

Carrie Upton