

I am a Faith Community Nurse working in the Catholic Church Community and want to share about a beautiful person in our fold, his name is Larry, and how he taught me that my ways are not necessarily his ways!

Larry is stone deaf, always appeared unkempt, and comes across as a real loner. He rides his bike to Mass every Sunday, never misses and sits usually up near the front of the church among the 'nice ladies'. When the sermon is long, Larry has been known to flap open his church newspaper and block the speaker from view, which doesn't seem to faze the Priests. I guess from Larry's point of view, when one can't hear the sermon, may as well read something of interest.

As Parish Nurse, my concern for some months was that Larry had developed a seemingly upset stomach, belching very loudly (which one maybe would do if one couldn't hear.) As the months went on, even the children had become used to the loud explosions and had ceased them to giggle.

As a Parish Nurse, I decided it was time that I visited this man of faith and sorted out his worrying gas problems. I thought maybe he had a terminal condition and required me to minister to him medically and spiritually. As a back up, I enlisted the company of Father David the Parish Priest, I actually wondered if he may be in need of the last Sacrament or at the very least a referral to a Gastroenterologist.

We walked around the side of his house where a noisy dog warned us that he was on guard. On entering the house we were greeted to many earthly treasures stored on many tiered shelves, rather like a cave effect, with Larry at the end recumbent on his bed.....watching a soap on his TV.

His delight at a visit was obvious as he leapt off the bed almost embracing us, shouting his delight. After introductions, it seemed the time to indicate my concern about his health so at that point I gestured toward his stomach. He laughed, obviously misinterpreting my pathetic sign language, and stated, "I'm never hungry, look". He threw open his enormous fridge which had literally dozens of packs of pizzas and sausages, resplendent in their orderly heaps, then yet another fridge in his hall with unbelievably as many of the gaseous culprits again like orderly prisoners, waiting for extermination. Sheepishly I looked at Fr. David and I knew, it was not appropriate to delve any deeper, the retorts echoing around the church were quite obviously not caused by undiagnosed terminal illness but the result of Larry's favourite food choices, the culprit of the noisy outbursts.

Excitedly Larry physically dragged us both out to his shed where a model T resplendent in all its partially restored glory was quickly started up, given full throttle and I guess being deaf has its benefits, as the truck had no muffler. The engine noise was only slightly drowned out by the shouting of Larry's voice as he explained how he'd lovingly given this truck new life. The effects of the exhaust fumes were what finally drew us out of the shed and back to his castle, the Nurse part of me in awe that he had not been carried off by the effects of carbon monoxide fumes in the process of his hobby..

A cleaning lady came to start her twice weekly clean.....but did what she apparently always did on these occasions, took the dog for a walk.

Before we left, Larry threw a can of beer to Fr. David and said we were the best visitors he'd had for ages....apart from the community Mental Health Nurse who brings my pills every week. "I don't drink alcohol now" said Larry then went on to say "its best when you're schizophrenic".

Larry taught me that there are no rules, and not to judge a book by it's cover. Now when I see him come into the Church, covered in paint, hair askew and kneeling reverently to pray, ignoring the "oh dear" looks of startled visitors while maybe dealing with the gas from his breakfast pizza, I thank God for him and his ability to continue seeking God in his quiet and maybe lonely world.

While I thank God for him I just wish he'd not rush off home after Mass before I or anyone else could make him feel more part of our Community.

But I guess, lunch awaits!