

## Bereavement Listening Course

*By Rev. Ian Goring*

A four-session course in *bereavement listening* was held in Castlemilk in November-December, initiated and supported by the *Priority Areas* team. The course came at a good time in the life of the two Church of Scotland congregations here. The plan for Castlemilk is that the two congregations will unite – hopefully in a new building. However, as preparations for that day, we have been looking for ways in which Castlemilk East and Castlemilk West can work together. One of the avenues we have been exploring is bereavement care and we set up a small working group to take on this task. Some time ago, bereavement care was identified as a priority area of work for the Castlemilk East congregation. A number of people had done training in the conduct of funerals, and they had started an annual *Bereavement Service* in November to which those who had lost loved ones in the previous year were specially invited. With our new joint *Bereavement Care Working Group*, we began to consider how best the two congregations in partnership together can support those who have lost loved ones. At present we have a very simple strategy (although other ideas are being looked at):

1. Flowers given to families soon after a funeral
2. A visit paid by one of our *Bereavement Care Visiting Team* around 6 weeks after a funeral, taking a pastoral card (published by CPO) from the congregation.
3. A visit paid by one of Team members around the first anniversary of a bereavement, with a CPO anniversary pastoral card.
4. Continue the annual Bereavement Service

The proposal to have a structured approach to visiting (i.e. Items 2 and 3) was new to both congregations. Quite a number of people were happy with the idea of delivering flowers, but not everyone was comfortable with the idea of paying a visit – even though experience shows that the people visited often only want a brief conversation at the door.

This is where the *Bereavement Listening Course* proved timely. While others can comment on what they got from the course, it was certainly our hope that bereavement care visitors would gain confidence in paying these visits and begin to feel a bit better equipped to approach people's doors and to deal with whatever might happen when the door opens. Bereavement care will continue to be an important priority in Castlemilk and I have no doubt that this course has taken our understanding of some of the issues involved a step further.

*By Claudette Hardy, Participant*

As part of my *Bereavement Group* I attended the four session course on listening on Tuesday evenings from 17<sup>th</sup> November to 8<sup>th</sup> December, each lasting 2½ hours. There were representatives from 3 churches - Toryglen, Castlemilk West & Castlemilk East. On the first night there was quite a large number there (17 or 19 I think) but some people felt it was not for them so did not return.

Dorothy Smith (our tutor) spoke of learning to listen without judgement, using eye contact and being relaxed. She stressed the importance of listening - whether it be in a bereavement situation or something else. My own feelings were that I thought she would be dealing with bereavement right away but Dorothy said that would come later ; we had to deal with listening properly first of all. In latter sessions I found the benefit of this. Dorothy made us think things through and as a group we agreed that we now thought more about what we were about to say, that everyone is not the same, and that bereavement takes in lots of different things - not only death.

It was amazing how she managed to get us involved in role-plays; people who normally wouldn't become involved volunteered to come forward - such was her way of making us feel confident enough and by the fact that by the end of the course people had 'gelled' and felt safe in sharing their feelings. We learned through other peoples' experience of situations they had been involved in and each week Dorothy gave us hand-outs to take home and read.

I think the course was very worthwhile and I gained a lot from it (dare I say very refreshing from some I have attended). The group are already putting into practice what we learnt from the course. Hopefully the course will be run again so that others may benefit from it.