



Volume 63 | Issue 1

Article 54

5-1-2020

Behers' "Spiritual care for people living with dementia using multisensory interventions: A practical guide for chaplains" (book review)

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Recommended Citation

Hippenhammer, Craighton (2020) "Behers' "Spiritual care for people living with dementia using multisensory interventions: A practical guide for chaplains" (book review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 63: Iss. 1, Article 54.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2199>

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Book Reviews



Behers, R. (2018). *Spiritual care for people living with dementia using multisensory interventions: A practical guide for chaplains*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 127 pp. \$17.28. ISBN 9781785928116

How is it possible for hospital chaplains, pastors, and other spiritual care providers to communicate with Alzheimer's and other dementia patients in the end stages of their disease? Most such leaders do not have the training to reach through the fog of badly damaged brain tissue to even get a simple response, let alone be able to offer genuine, helpful, spiritual care. The author of this book, Richard Behers, an experienced hospice chaplain and spiritual care health program manager, appeals to ministers, priests, imams, rabbis, and other spiritual care leaders to put in the effort it takes to effectively minister to those who cannot attend their congregation's meetings, because even though it might not be immediately evident, these sufferers are in desperate need of their presence.

It is common for family members to tear up when relating how they came to feel that there was no other choice than to admit their dementia-affected loved one into a long-term health care facility. But they light up, excited, when the chaplain provides the Dementia Care Protocol that the author has created and shared in this book. The Protocol uses music, specialty photographs, aromas, tactile objects and affirmations of personal worth which can spark "awakenings." Later chapters present models on how to use these techniques, emphasizing the imperatives of the patients' personhood and appreciating the deep sacrifice of their caregivers. Common affirmations include "You matter. You matter to God. You matter to me. You are special. You are special to God. God loves you. You are a child of God. You are safe." (Night terrors are commonly experienced by dementia patients.) Caregivers are exhausted.

The medical terminology of dementia can be challenging – words like anomia (difficulty finding words), aphasia (impairment of language), and prosopagnosia (inability to recognize familiar people). Likewise, it is difficult to understand what the dementia sufferer would like to say, but can't, so such words seldom get spoken. Words that beg for understanding and expectations for their care. Such as, I am a person of worth, treat me as such. Be patient with me. I would like to respond to

you quickly, but I simply cannot. Don't correct me; let it slide. This is the best that I can manage. Don't shake me. Play music I knew when I was younger. Pay attention to me. I'm not dead yet.

This book should be a required purchase for all university, college, temple, mosque, church and seminary libraries.

Reviewer

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