

Blessed, broken and given



Caroline Grogan

glorifying



Hi, my name is Caroline.

I was born in Australia but quickly travelled to my mother's village on the Pacific island of Kiribati, where my father taught as a lay Catholic Missionary. There I was baptised as a baby. My father had named me after Caroline Chisholm who was an inspiring, progressive 19th century humanitarian. Caroline Chisholm was respected for her social work especially with female immigrants and the Aboriginal people. Dad has always encouraged me to seek inspiration from altruistic female role models like Caroline Chisholm.

After my mother's tragic plight, my dad returned to Australia with me and my two older siblings Joe and Alice. I basically grew up without my mother so my dad took extra care of me. We still enjoy walking along the beach together. Once we were walking along the Sandgate foreshore and came across a young baby bird on the footpath. I picked it up and Dad helped me to climb the tree and place the baby bird safely back into its nest.

I am also inspired by the Beatitudes, especially

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3).

My faith and belief guides my research at QUT and my work in Centacare. Following my Bachelor in Human Services and Master in Social Work, I've felt called to focus even more on nurturing dementia friendly communities in Brisbane.

Through my work and research towards a PhD, I encounter the blessed yet broken Body of Christ in people living with dementia, particularly the elderly and frail. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus teaches,

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Christ invites me to seek him, to encounter him through supporting people living with dementia. I believe these are among the most vulnerable groups in society. I am consistently inspired by Centacare's mission of providing 'Catholic support services, providing help and creating hope'. This spirit also inspires my presentations at national and international conferences to raise awareness about dementia and highlight the cutting edge of dementia research.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Blessed
+
Broken

When the gravity of reality takes its toll on my energy or optimism, I visit the St Stephen's Chapel for Mass or to share a personal prayer with our Blessed Mother Mary and our own Australian Saint Mary MacKillop. After the 10am Sunday Mass at St Stephen's Cathedral, I meet with my friends in the St Stephen's Young Adult Ministry, which we call our YAM family, and we enjoy a social lunch with friends from YAM choir, the altar serving team, and the Timorese Queensland community. This revitalises me to focus on the blessings in my life and the small but important steps forward.

I am passionate about adapting a UK concept to create a more inclusive environment for people living with dementia to enable them to live in the community for longer. Through Centacare in Brisbane North, we have developed a Memory Café. This began from a conversation with two passionate people and grew into a partnership between Churches of Christ and Centacare. To create a space where father and daughter, husband and wife, can renew their relationship and move beyond the impact of a carer's role. This grew to encompass multiple sites across North Brisbane, growing from one to many Memory Cafés, creating dementia friendly communities. These communities are like the seeds of hope falling into the ground. In the words of Vincent Van Gogh: *Great things are done by a series of small things, done together.*

We try to offer meaningful engagement so people's dignity is maintained throughout all the stages of their life. Clients in our community can access local Mass, or our handyman's Men's Shed or share outings: picnics, fishing or walking adventures. There are options to garden or create arts and crafts, volunteer with meals on wheels or assist in the kitchen to cook a communal meal. We simply try to offer a place at the table to feel welcome, able, and valued members of our community.

It pains me when I hear people living with dementia referred to as 'sufferers' or 'disabled'. Jesus teaches us to value the dignity and capacities of every person, no matter the challenges in their life. This inspires me to seek a person-centred, strengths-based approach starting from the use of inclusive language. It's not easy, and sometimes I make mistakes, but I try to remember Pope Francis' encouragement, *'While we can tire from asking for Mercy, God never tires of giving us Mercy.'*

Working with elderly and people living with dementia means I encounter the tangible loss of death. When life becomes too challenging, or the research deadlines and work duties overlap and I feel exhausted or broken down, I try to remember this text from Psalm 107:

*Their hearts were bowed down, with hard labour, they fell down, with no one to help.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress;
he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.
Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wonderful works for humankind.*

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