

GUEST EDITORIAL

Tom Gordon

It was a privilege to be invited to chair the organising group for the conference to celebrate the 10th anniversary of this journal and to host the conference itself. To quote the commercial, the conference “did what it says on the tin”, and was a genuine celebration of one of the most respected journals in its field. It is an additional pleasure to have been invited to be guest editor of this edition of the journal which contains some of the excellent material offered at the conference.

When I was a small boy I travelled regularly by train with my family on the railway line down the West Coast of Scotland between Fort William and Glasgow. It was always a great adventure, and never more so than when we stopped at the station in the little village of Crianlarich, almost at the half-way point of the journey. This was to allow the train on the up-line to pass the one on the down-line, and so the station platform stood in the centre of the station with the two lines running along either side. And the best part was judging whether you had enough time to get off the train, buy your cup of British Rail tea, and get on again before the train continued on its journey. Being too small, I was never allowed off the train. But I would have loved to be on the platform with the big people. It always seemed more exciting out there.

Our celebration conference saw us stopping at our Crianlarich Station to take time to pause and reflect now a major part of the journey was over – grown-ups alighting from the train, stretching our legs, and taking refreshments on board. We’ve done well these past ten years. It’s been a journey worth celebrating. But having taken time to buy the conference equivalent of a cup of BR tea, we now have to keep our eye on the train to make sure we’re ready for the next stage of the journey of the SJHC and be safely on board for what is yet to come.

So what did we find when we stopped at the platform? Of course we talked about **chaplaincy** in different ways, competence and compassion, the offering of the real person and not hiding behind a mask or remaining encased in a suit of armour. We

remembered the importance of story, the need to listen, and to take seriously what we learn from the people in our care. And when we’re on the train again? We’ll keep exploring our role, our development and our professionalism. These are exciting times.

We faced up to **change**, in a healthcare climate where it’s often said that the only constant is change. Change means thinking about what needs to be renewed, how the journal needs to pick up the thinking that’s been shared at the conference, and what developments need to be worked on. There’s a lot of work for the Editorial Board to do. And going forward? Change is also about what needs to be left behind, what dies, what is finished and done, so that we’re all the more ready to travel on.

Clearly, **challenge** was also a theme - to work in that vulnerable place, which is often scary and precarious, inhabiting that space which others decline to enter; and to believe we have something to say and something to offer, as chaplains, through the journal, about theology, and much more. And for the next stage of the journey we take on the additional challenge of not believing we know it all or can do it all, remembering that taking the high-road of arrogance or self-satisfaction is fraught with dangers.

Like the Women’s Institute in England a few years ago, we have **choices** to face. That doesn’t mean we *have* to choose members of the Editorial Board to pose for a tasteful nude calendar like the women of the WI, celebrated so well in the movie *Calendar Girls...* But we still have choices to make, about content, commissioned pieces, research articles, and the like, to make sure the standards of the journal are kept high. That’s what we’ve always done, and, thankfully, we’ll take that willingness to wrestle with important choices as we move on.

Are we prepared for risks, the **chances** which will come our way? We took a risk starting the journal ten years ago. Clearly, it was a risk worth taking. The conference was ample evidence of that. But when we’re back on board the train and more chances come

our way, are we up for that? Chances to address people's search for meaning in the face of life-threatening events, not patronising them or ducking our responsibilities; chances to offer our work for public and professional scrutiny, through our journal or others, and not being ashamed of what we have to offer; chances to say what we believe, for the good of our healthcare system and for the institutional church. Dare we be risk-takers?

We met with **chums** as we've downed our cup of tea on the Crianlarich platform. Old friendships were strengthened and new collaborations begun. Ours was an international conference. We were not on the platform alone. We had time to relax together, to share worship, to laugh and learn, to be well fed and entertained. And as the train pulls out and some of us are running to catch it before it leaves? A hand comes out to pull us aboard, and we settle down again with good people when we face the future journey together.

We had time for **checking** things out, a necessary pause for reflection. We thought about integrity, faced up to compromise, asked – and perhaps even began to answer – important questions, and we were stimulated in our questioning and answering by some excellent contributions. Let's keep doing that so that we continue to be enlivened on the journey itself and not just on the platform when the train has stopped.

Most certainly we have **character**. We have a respected journal. But individually too, we are characters, unique, special, valuable and valued. We have the uniqueness of our character to offer to our work, our chaplaincy, the healing for the people in our care and the brokenness of our world. Mel Schofield, our after-dinner speaker at our celebration dinner, reminded us that the Bible tells us that 'There were giants in the land', and suggested that we might be giants as we are and where we are, and that, in our conference, we might just be sitting in the presence of giants. We have that uniqueness, that character, to take our journal forward, and for that we should never be ashamed.

On the adventure of our travelling, grown ups on the platform or soon-to-be-grown-ups on the train, there is much to be enjoyed on the journey as well as just stopping for a break at Crianlarich station. But, look! Our train's ready to pull away. There's a whistle blowing, and, in the mind of a small boy on his way to his Granny's, there's a hiss of steam and a great puff of smoke. 'All aboard', someone cries! So, wait for me, I don't want to miss the next part of this adventurous journey.

Tom Gordon is chaplain at the Marie Curie Hospice, Edinburgh, and has been a member of the SJHC since its beginnings. He was chair of the conference organising group.