



â??I love being a chaplainâ??

## Description



A meal and MRI scan opened up a new world for retired headteacher Eileen Simmons (pictured). Sheâ??s since become an Anna Chaplain, specialising in the spiritual care of older people.

Twenty years ago, Eileen and her husband were dining with friends. One of the group asked if soup was on the menu. She was told, yes it was. But she asked again â?? three more times.

Concerned about such unusual behaviour, Eileen encouraged her friend to see a doctor. It couldâ??ve been a simple lapse of memory. For her friend, it led to a dementia diagnosis.

Around the same time, Eileen offered to help her son conduct research for a doctorate on imaging of the brain. This included her having an MRI scan and seeing the images, which Eileen found fascinating.

The 500-strong movement â?? many of whom are Methodists â?? support the spiritual care of older people

The church she and her husband were attending â?? Wesley Methodist Church, Leigh-on-Sea â?? pioneered a Memory Worship service for people â??with and without dementiaâ??.

The service has â??a beautiful, simple, set formâ??. Eileen explained. A table is laid out with a cross, Bible, prayer book and clock. Worshippers say the Lordâ??s Prayer and sing hymns.

â??Music plays a big part for people living with a form of dementia,â?? said Eileen. â??It often releases all sorts of memories.â??

Eileenâ??s journey led to her becoming an Anna Chaplain in 2019. The 500-strong movement â?? many of whom are Methodists â?? support the spiritual care of older people.

Anna Chaplaincy is named after the Bible character Anna â?? the widow and faithful older person â?? who, with Simeon, recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah. The first Anna Chaplain was former broadcaster and licensed lay minister Debbie Thrower.

Eileen believes faith can survive lifeâ??s challenges. â??I donâ??t think it ever goes,â?? she said. â??If people have a deep Christian faith, that will stay.â??

She encourages people to support those who live with serious conditions. She makes sure loved ones are looking after themselves, too. â??I love being a chaplain,â?? said Eileen.



Former broadcaster Debbie Thrower is founder of Anna Chaplaincy. You can reach them at [annachaplaincy.org.uk/contact-us](https://annachaplaincy.org.uk/contact-us)

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