The Spiritual Care of the Deeply Forgetful: Redefining Chaplaincy for the New Culture of Memory Care

John McFadden
Appleton, Wisconsin
USA
Dementia (AD in particular) has been called “the theological disease”

1. Religious faith sometimes defined as “remembering God and being mindful of God in all that I say and do.” Can one hold faith if one can no longer remember God?

2. Dementia is a “theological disease” because it raises core questions about what it is to be a self, or a creature formed in “the divine image.”
What is the self?
What is spirituality?
Elizabeth MacKinlay’s Model of Spirituality

Spirituality: ultimate meaning mediated through...

- Relationships
- Religion
- The arts
- Environment
Martin Buber
Jewish philosopher/theologian

“In the beginning is the relation”
(Buber, 1936)

I/Thou relationships
I/It relationships
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

“It is through the experience of being obligated that we truly exist.”
When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. To speak in hyperbole, when the Father laughs to the Son and the Son laughs back to the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and love gives the persons [of the Trinity] of which the Holy Spirit is one. (Blakney, 1941, p. 245)
Relationships of love and joy
One person’s “joy zones”
Chaplaincy in the New Culture of Memory Care:

- Affirming and enhancing the capacity to share in relationships of laughter, pleasure, joy and love
- Affirming the inherent dignity of obligations, including moral obligations (kindness to others)
- Helping to weave the web of community in which the categories that differentiate and divide (residents, staff, family, friends, etc) are “softened.”