

# Elderly 'go days without contact' at festive season

SOME pensioners go up to three days without having any human contact over Christmas, campaigners have said.

Senior Line, a free listening service for older people, has also reported a 41% increase in calls during 2017.

Anne Dempsey, communications manager with Third Age, which runs the Senior Line, said some elderly people are facing several days of isolation over Christmas and New Year.

She said: 'I was working a few years ago on St Stephen's night and I took a call. The caller had spoken to nobody on Christmas Eve, nobody on Christmas Day, and I was the first person they spoke to on St Stephen's Day.'

By **Olivia Kelleher**

'We are open all through Christmas, including Christmas Day, and we will get steady calls through Christmas Day. They will be phoning us as part of their Christmas cheer and friendship. For many, they will be calling us because Christmas is very stark and there is nobody in their lives at all.'

Ms Dempsey said she wants to increase awareness of the free national listening line, which is manned by volunteers who are themselves elderly.

She has urged members of the public to reach out to the elderly, particularly when weather conditions are poor.

She said: 'There are very simple things you can do.'

'There can be an assumption that older people don't have the same feelings or don't get the joy in being remembered or feeling important to somebody. We all like to be remembered. Dropping in to an older person with a gift can make a huge, huge difference.'

'I would also say to older people that they needn't be on their own. We would like to hear from them.'

Aine Brady, CEO of Third Age, said there are approximately 160,000 people aged over 65 living alone in the country. Senior Line's freephone number is 1800 80 45 91.

## Dr Mark Dooley



### MORAL MATTERS

# Candles bring hope all year round, not just at Christmas

**D**AWN and dusk: what's the difference these days? But don't despair for I am always with you, always there whenever you want me. I am the warm glow that drives back the darkness, that makes all things bright and beautiful.

Treat me as an old friend for I have been with you from the beginning. When they poured the sacred water on your tiny head, I was there keeping watch. Where I am, there is always life.

There was a time when I was everywhere. Nowadays, I am no longer in high demand. But wherever I am, things always seem brighter, better.

Look back on the most memorable occasions of your life, and you will see me there amid the merriment. I have never missed a single birthday, never forgotten to shine for your special day. Things change, people come and go, but I have always been there as you mark yet another year.

They say I make things warmer even when there is little heat. They say that no amount of gloom can withstand my gentle glow.

That is why I belong to Christmas, to that time when the weary world rejoices.

Light came into the world through a child. No bells or trumpets, no rolling thunder or awesome fireworks. Just a flicker of light and the whole world changed.

The light does not blind but simply defies the darkness. It is gentle, almost imperceptible. And yet, if it were not there you would miss it.

I remind you of this precious light – a light that glows but does not burn, that consoles but does not seek to overwhelm. I will be there on Christmas Day, just like every important meal of your life. They say I make a meal because, where I am, love is.

Think of love and there you will find me. I am central to romance, to those precious moments when life couldn't get any better. I am integral to intimacy, to times when the power of sweet love is all-consuming.

That is why I also belong to the sacred, for is not love born of sacred things?

True love is minted beyond time, everlasting and eternal. And so,

when they pray at their altars, when they offer up their sacrifices and worship in silence, I am there to guide their way.

I stand between two worlds, at the intersection of the timeless and of time. I herald the advance of eternity, the dawn of a new sun. Without me, there is no getting to the other side.

Death, too, is sacred. In loss, there must be light, for how else can we cope?

I am always there to remind you that, once lit, the light of love can never be extinguished.

I am a symbol of the spirit, of warmth and of life divine. Without me, neither Mozart nor Beethoven could have completed their masterpieces. Until recently, I was the guiding light of civilisation.

I am associated with mourning, joy, holiness, art and love. I am present during moments of prayer, feasting and of celebration. I am an icon of the best of times, a symbol of love amid any sorrow.

I belong to popes and paupers, to lovers and the broken-hearted. I stand guard before shrines and tombs. Without me, there cannot be a vigil for I am the healing light that soothes the mournful.

I am the living symbol of the lost. I radiate hope where none can be found. I do not last forever but, while I prevail, things always appear brighter.

**I** COME in all shapes and sizes and can be adapted to suit any occasion. I offer comfort to those in pain, hope to those in despair, reverence to the departed. I bring a sense of love, warmth and joy to all those who have cause to smile.

I am not just a candle but an eternal flame which has lit the way of humanity down the ages. I am not mere wax and wick but a symbol of light that pierces the haze and ascends to Heaven. I am neither decoration nor accessory but the gentle fire that burns from baptism to burial and far beyond.

Remember, then, that candles are not just for Christmas.

Wherever they burn there is life and love and hope and peace. Wherever they glimmer, twinkle or shine, the path of our human journey will never grow dim.

Strike a match, ignite the wick and watch the darkness melt away. All will be well.

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