

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme

3. Caring for yourself at a time of loss

St Luke's is addressing this *to you* as a member of the clergy - we want you to take special note of how you are in yourself, every day, because we care about your wellbeing. In addition to conducting funerals in different and difficult circumstances we realise that, very sadly, it may be you that mourns the loss of family, friends or parishioners. We offer you these thoughts, which you may also find valuable to share with others.

Loss made harder

You will already be very aware of the many difficult things to bear in the midst of this Covid-19 crisis - and one of the most heart-rending is the death of a close family member or friend, whether through Covid-19 or some other cause. It is difficult enough to bear in the course of normal life, but the bereavement and grief is made worse if a mourner is not able to be with them when they died, nor able to gather together for the funeral and celebration of their life that they would have wanted or planned. And the usual ways in which people would have been there for each other, to console and support with a touch or a hug, are currently denied to us too. Not being able to say goodbye properly either at the bedside or at a funeral can leave us with complicated feelings of guilt, regret, and maybe a sense that we haven't been able to make a good enough ending.

Recognising new demands

At this critical time, we are all highly conscious of death and funerals and the attendant losses, but we at St Luke's are particularly aware of the losses you as clergy may be experiencing that go beyond the mortality rate. Caring for *yourself* at a time of loss involves the recognition that almost the entire field of your usual ministerial practice, as well your family life and additional concern for distanced elderly relatives and friends, has changed. Change is not necessarily negative - and clergy report some creative ministry developing - but nonetheless this remains a demanding time and looking after yourself within it is essential.

Facing change

Many clergy are faced with changes in their own spiritual disciplines that were established in theological college and have been practiced in much the same way since - for instance sharing the offices with ordained colleagues and celebrating the Eucharist. It is important

that you recognise your feelings related to these losses, and know that they are valid - and not to be dismissed in the face of the enormity of other forms of bereavement.

Take a few minutes to reflect:

- *Can I take a compassionate moment each morning, recognising the validity of my own losses?*
- *Am I struggling to deal with the complicated emotions relating to the funerals of people I know and love at this time?*
- *Am I able to accept that I am doing the best I can in circumstances that are outside my control and remember God's grace is present to transform my endeavours?*
- *Is there someone I know and trust with whom I can share some of the difficult emotions?*

If reading this has led you to want to seek additional support or signposting please contact either the person in your diocese responsible for clergy wellbeing or St Luke's via its website or on 020 7898 1700.

St Luke's thanks Hilary Ison and the Tragedy and Congregations team - www.tragedyandcongregations.org.uk - for permission to use their work as part of its Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme.