

## **Caring for The Wellbeing of Your Clergy; Resources for Church Wardens**

As a Church Warden, or a Lay Reader, you will be closer to your clergy than most members of the congregation, for you will have more contact and conversations in the course of your duties while planning services, working together on PCC, and making other decisions about the church's life and maintenance.

You may notice that your incumbent or curate is becoming increasingly stressed or even distressed, and you feel concern for their on-going wellbeing. This paper offers suggestions on what can you do to support her or him, and who you can turn to for advice and help. We offer some symptoms of accumulating stress, together with questions to ask yourself, action that you can take, and further resources to access.

### **Signs and symptoms of stress**

- Your vicar or curate has become withdrawn - maybe uncharacteristically avoiding people;
- she or he returns to the vicarage as soon as possible after a service;
- he or she may be more irritable, grumpy, angry or critical, and may look despairing;
- becomes forgetful, agitated, and/or tearful;
- decision making more difficult;
- looks tired and exhausted (notice their body language);
- may resent and reject your caring enquiries;
- has frequent colds, flu or minor illness, and takes longer than usual to recover;
- suffers rapid weight loss or gain, and eats lots of sweet foods, or does not eat healthily;
- has a collapse in self-image, and low personal care as regards grooming and hygiene;
- struggles to cope with others' emotions e.g. at funerals where they would normally manage;
- loss of interest in their ministry;
- cuts short PCC's and other meetings;
- may display a false cheerfulness;
- may complain of disturbed sleep patterns;
- takes on even more work and responsibility;
- driving unsafely or exhibits other risk-taking characteristics e.g. increased alcohol intake;
- not taking time off "*In order to get the work done*";



Do not ignore other symptoms or signs of accumulating stress; ask yourself, what exactly are the signs that have alerted your awareness that all is not well?

## Some Questions

- Have others noticed or recently expressed concern about your curate or vicar?
- Is your clergy person stressed because of a recent personal loss or bereavement, or parish incident? E.g. difficult funeral, tough parish demands, parish conflicts, family problems or personal illness.
- In your experience, does he/she just need extra time off and support to recover?
- Is this level of stress escalating towards crisis, or becoming chronic?
- Make a realistic assessment of the closeness of your relationship with your clergy person. Will you be listened to if you raise your concerns?
- Are you the best person to approach her/him? Or would it be more supportive if someone else were to raise your concerns?
- You can consult and have advice and support for yourself and your clergy through talking to the incumbent (if it is the curate you are concerned about), the Area Dean, or Archdeacon.



## Action

- If you have a good relationship with your incumbent, arrange a confidential time and place to meet and mention your concerns and offer practical support. Allow plenty of time.
- Otherwise, consult a supportive senior clergy person - the Area Dean or Archdeacon or if appropriate, and they have a good relationship, an active retired clergy person in the parish.
- Talk (confidentially) to your parish safe-guarding officer. Your priest needs to be kept emotionally and psychologically safe.
- Keep praying for her/him. Remember to respect and keep in confidence, any shared information, unless permission is given to share further.

## Further resources:

- Additional time off. This would be arranged through senior clergy.
- Residential retreat (funded by the church).
- Counselling (free through the diocese).
- Flowers and an appreciative card from the PCC.
- A funded meal out with friends/family.
- Encourage your priest to talk with their spiritual director and/or pastoral supervisor.
- If your incumbent agrees, request arrangements for temporary help from a senior clergy person: Area Dean or Archdeacon.



## **Good self-care for Church Wardens**

As a Church Warden, you have been entrusted with, and accepted considerable responsibilities by your church. You have many tasks to complete and many issues that you need to keep an eye on, especially during this COVID 19 pandemic where there is a constant and sometimes contradictory stream of information about church maintenance and services.

Added to this, the care of your incumbent and other clergy who appear increasingly stressed and to be coping less efficiently, will add to your own loss of energy reserves.

Take good care of yourself too! Do make sure that you have regular time away from church matters, a day or two off from these responsibilities, meeting with family and friends unconnected with your work for the church. Relax and have fun! Develop your hobbies. Exercise regularly.

You can protect your personal time by letting the incumbent and church members know which days of the week you regularly take off, making it clear that you are not available on those days. You can also support yourself on your days off by putting an 'out of office' message on your computer and phone so that people are reminded of your free time and that you are not ignoring a call or message. Keeping these personal boundaries is essential for your own mental wellbeing and that of those you live with!

It is wise to not discuss PCC or other church business with close friends or family members as this may burden the relationship. Instead, get in touch with other Church Wardens who can share from their experiences, and where mutual support and prayer can be shared between you. In this way you will keep your other friendships 'clean'.

Thank God for Church Wardens, and we thank God for you! Without your willingly given time, support, experience and wisdom, many clergy and church communities would struggle significantly.

You deserve the time and space to take care of yourself as well as your church and incumbent.

Thank you.

Derby Diocese Clergy Wellbeing Team

