

# Pastoral Skills Course



Updated: April 2024

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# Introduction



## The Rt Revd Karen Gorham Bishop of Sherborne, with responsibility for Lay Ministry

The richness of the Church is the celebration and outworking of many gifts and ministries. We all need one another to live out our calling as Christ's disciples and to make Jesus known across our local communities, in our schools and workplaces through the church's partnership in local mission.

This course has been prepared to further equip those who wish to follow the call to service through lay pastoral ministry. Based on scripture it will, through prayer, practical action and reflection, enable those who will serve in this way to think and pray about how their ministry might be shaped to serve those we come into contact with and to express something of God's deep love for all people.

This course is offered with thanks to those who have prepared it, will tutor it, and those whose discipleship will be deepened by it.

### Bible passage

**'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:40**

# Who are we?

## Welcome to the Pastoral Skills training course

### Opening prayer

You may like to use the prayer of Teresa of Avila: read it slowly, with silence in between each line. As you think back to the introductory session, and the calling and gifts you explored, offer this time of formation and training to God.

Lord Jesus, teach us  
that you have no body now on earth but  
ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your  
compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go  
about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must  
bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake. Amen.

### Gatherings

Introductions: Use a light-hearted icebreaker activity to get to know each other.

*Confidentiality: It is important to set the boundaries and expectations of the group. You should share only what you feel comfortable talking about. The leader will help the group to formulate a contract of confidentiality at this point.*

We have agreed:

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

### Why am I here?

In pairs, (preferably with someone you don't know well) take it in turns to talk for three minutes about what has brought you to the beginning of this course, why you are here, what have been the key moments and people involved. Go back to the group prepared to share two brief points from what the other person has said.

*As we begin this course we do not only come as individuals. We come from parishes, benefices, ministry teams, deaneries, neighbourhood chaplaincies and congregations. All of these are communities of which you are a part and this pastoral skills training group will become a community in its own right. Which 'communities' have played a role in bringing you to this place today?*

## What do I bring?

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You may feel you come to potential pastoral ministry and to this training course with little experience or skill, but you will be bringing a variety of gifts from your life experiences, work, and faith. Use this grid to reflect on what you bring to the formation process and to potential ministry.

Share one aspect from each quarter with the group.

Gifts

Skills

Experience

Networks

## Who are we in context?

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Matthew 25.31-40

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

## Questions

---

1

Who are the ‘least of these’ in your context?

2

How are you serving Christ in responding to the needs of your community?

3

Which groups might not be reached by your church or chaplaincy’s pastoral care provision?

4

Are there steps you might take to explore these questions further (e.g. community audit or survey, responding to the needs of the community in a new way)?

## Working together

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1 Corinthians 12.12-31

‘For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior members, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles,

second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.’

## Questions

---

1

How is Paul’s image of the body reflected in your ministry context?

2


How would you describe your role in the ‘body of Christ’?

## Activity

---

Draw a diagram of the relationships in the primary context where you will be serving. For most this will be a church or group of churches, but for some it will be a chaplaincy team in a specific context. What are the different roles within this context, and how do they relate to each other?

You might like to discuss this with your ministry team. Before you are commissioned you will draw up with your incumbent or supervisor a written understanding of your responsibilities.





## Prayer and formation

---

As pastoral ministers it is vital that we develop and sustain our own prayer and spirituality. We cannot minister to others well if we are not rooted in the love of God ourselves. We cannot be Christ's body on earth if we are not walking daily with him. You may already have an established pattern of reading the Bible and praying on your own or with others or this may be fairly new to you. As you embark on this time of training and formation it is a good opportunity to review your current practice, try new things, and to develop habits that will sustain you in your ministry going forward.

Each session of the course includes at least one Bible passage as well as times for prayer as a group. These readings are a resource for you to reflect on following the session to explore in different ways.

At the end of each session, you will be asked to undertake a prayer or reflection activity drawing on the topics you have been exploring. This will help to embed both the issues you have been discussing, and a regular practice of prayer. You may find this fits alongside an existing pattern, or you may want to lay aside your current pattern for a time during the course. Do discuss this with the course leader or your incumbent or spiritual director if that is helpful.

There will be a space after each session for you to note down your experiences and reflections, or you may want to keep or continue a separate journal in which you reflect on the course, including responding to the sessions and the prayer focus between each session.

## Closing prayer

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*Spend some time in silence or open prayer offering your community to God.*

*Turn to face the doors:*

To a troubled world

**peace from Christ.**

To a searching world

**love from Christ.**

To a waiting world

**hope from Christ.**

## Prayer focus before next time: Prayerful attentiveness

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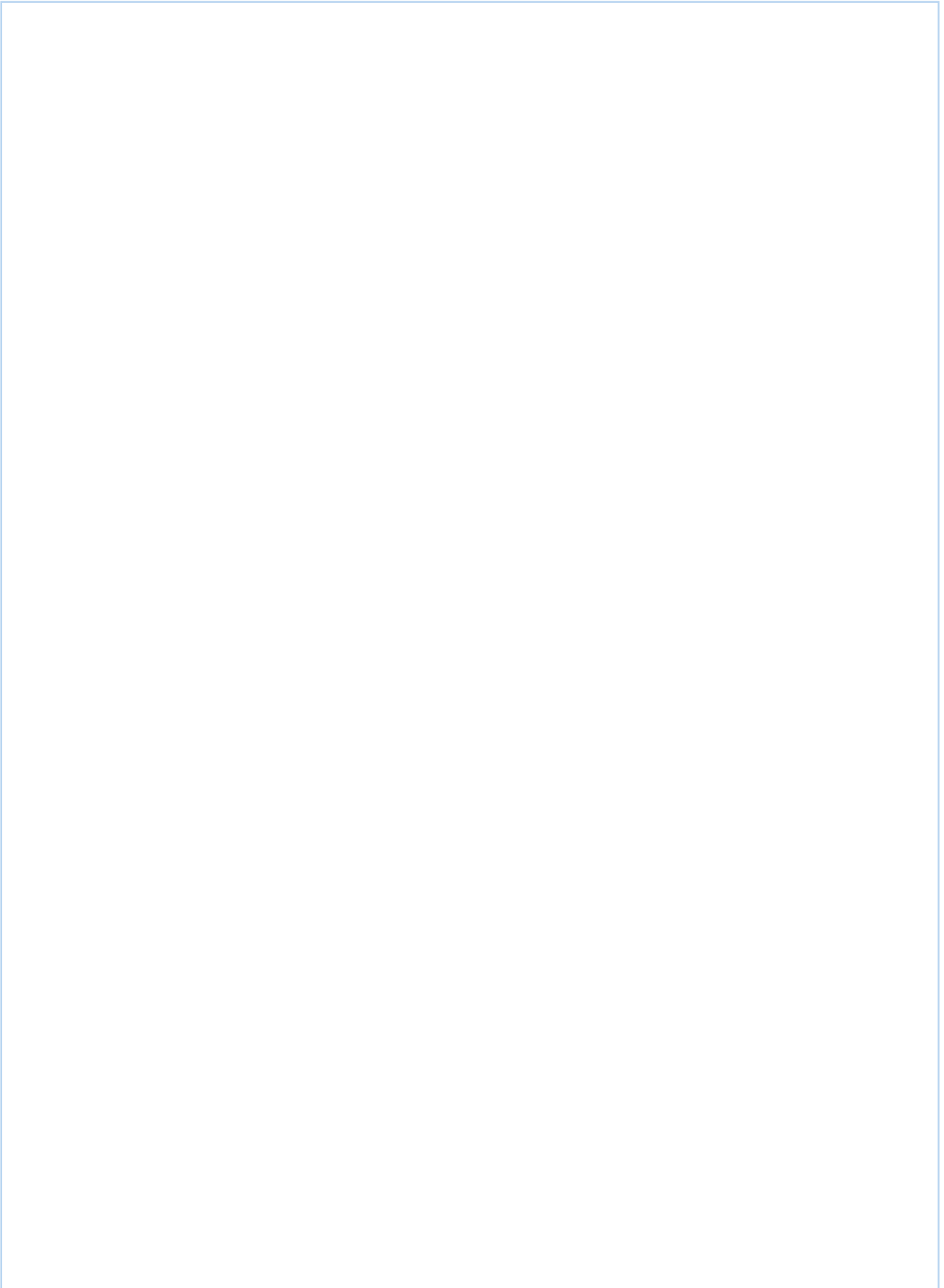
You have been given an opportunity during this session to find out more about the communities you serve. Before the next session, for at least a week develop a habit of prayerful attentiveness. As you are going shopping, while you are at work, walking the dog, or driving around your community, ask God to help you look with his eyes. Pay attention to the people you meet or pass by, especially those you don't normally see; notice their expression, their body language, the situations they are dealing with. There is no need to make conversation, but try making eye contact, smiling or giving a simple greeting. See each one of them as a child of God.

At the end of each day spend some time offering to God all those people and situations you have noticed. Ramsay wrote of prayer as 'being with God with the people on our heart.'

At the end of the week write a short reflection on the experience. What have you discovered about God? What have you discovered about your community? What have you discovered about yourself?

## Weekly reflection

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A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a weekly reflection. It occupies the central portion of the page.

# Who am I?

## Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body  
now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your  
compassion  
Must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you  
Must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you  
Must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

## Case study

Mandy has been asked to visit Brenda, whose husband died about a year ago. She is in her 80s and is feeling lonely. Mandy listens to Brenda's story and hears her speak of the release death was for her husband, and how she misses him. Brenda then mentions her son, and it becomes clear that he died aged 17 on holiday in France with friends in a swimming accident. Mandy suddenly feels overwhelmed by the story. 'How awful' she says, 'How could you live with that?' on the verge of tears. Brenda seems taken aback by Mandy's reaction, and the visit soon comes to an end. Reflecting afterwards, Mandy realises that this story had reminded her of a friend from university who had been paralysed through a swimming accident, but they had lost touch soon afterwards.

### Case study questions

- What did Mandy learn from this encounter?
- Have you ever had a similar experience?
- What could Mandy do to prevent similar things happening again?

Pastoral encounters can bring us face to face with incidents or issues in our own lives which we may or may not be aware of beforehand. It is important to spend some time honestly and prayerfully exploring our own stories and experiences so that we can be more prepared.

## My timeline

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Use this page to plot key events and stages in your life from your birth until now (e.g. starting school, moving house, new job, bereavement, marriage, birth of child, retirement etc).

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to plot key events and stages in their life from birth until now.

Reflect on how each event made you feel. What were the high points and low points?

Share with your neighbour anything you feel comfortable saying about what strikes you from your timeline. What were the most significant events? How might your experiences affect your pastoral role? (This may be positive – experiences that give you insights into situations you will encounter – but be aware of the dangers in assuming others will respond in the same way as you.)

## Spiritual timeline

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Add your spiritual life to your timeline here too. When did you come to believe in God? How has your relationship with God changed through the experiences of your life? How would you describe your spiritual journey?

### Bible passage

**'But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'** Isaiah 43.1

## Bible passage

‘While he [Jesus] was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, ‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they scolded her. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’

Mark 14.3-9

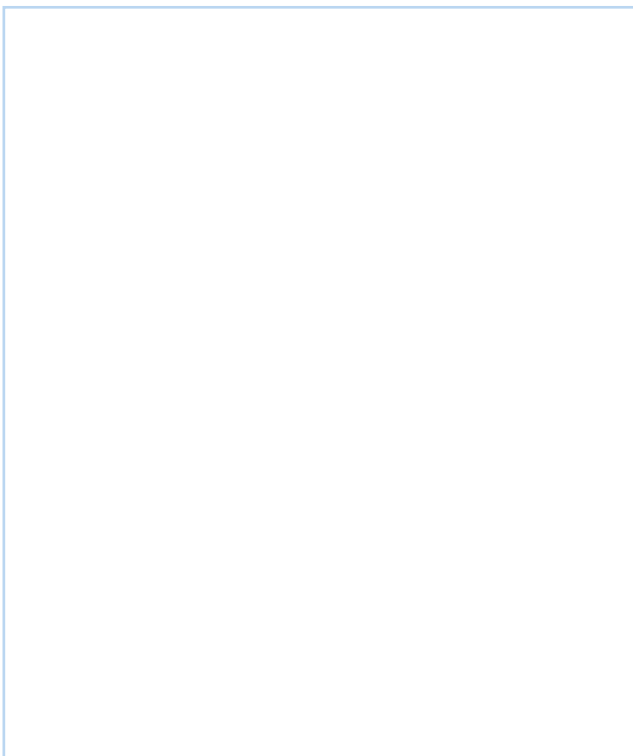
## Consider

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Throughout his earthly life Jesus was ministered to by others as well as offering ministry himself. It is an important model for all ministers to remember that we all need to be humble and open to receiving from others as well as giving of ourselves.

1

Identify one period on your timeline that was difficult or challenging.



2

Reflect on who helped you during that time. What was helpful about their ministering to you?



## How do others see us?

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Although we are perhaps still getting to know each other, we will work in pairs to see how others perceive us, and whether we agree! Often first impressions turn out to be wrong and it is easy to misjudge a person on the first visit.

In pairs, take it in turns to describe to the other person.

A) Two main strengths of your own personality (e.g. organised, sympathetic etc.)

1

2

B) One weakness

3

C) One significant way in which you have grown in self-knowledge

4

D) Does your partner agree?

5

## How do others see us? Continued

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In the large group:

E) What is the importance of first impressions?

6

F) How can we be more aware of how people see us?

7

## Personality type

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Human beings differ from one another in ways that are consistent. Each of us has preferred ways of experiencing life and forming judgements.

Those preferences are not random or erratic, but stable over time. Your personality has not radically altered over your lifetime. Someone meeting you today for the first time since you were at school together would still recognise your personality. You will have aged and perhaps matured into a more rounded personality. Nevertheless, characteristic qualities of individual human personality

are clear and endure from earliest childhood.

There are different ways we can become more aware of who we are, to help us understand how we relate to other people, and why we act in certain ways, including personality type indicators such as Myers-Briggs and the Enneagram, and models of how we work with others such as Belbin. There are courses available from time to time through the Diocesan Continuing Ministerial Development programme, and numerous books or websites which can give you further information.



## How does God see us?

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Luke 15.11-24

‘Jesus continued: There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’” So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.’

## Questions

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1

What was the younger son’s story of his life?

2

How was the father’s story about his son different?

3

How would God tell the story of your life?

## Conclusion

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What are three things that you will want to be aware of about yourself in your pastoral role? This could be about time, about issues or situations that you would struggle to deal with, or about a weakness that could get in the way.

1

2

3

If this session has brought up painful issues for you, you may want to talk them through with a trusted friend, a member of your church ministry team, or a professional counsellor as part of good self-care.

If you have not recently taken the Church of England Basic and Foundation Safeguarding courses, now would be a good time to do these as they will complement your learning on the pastoral skills course.

They can be accessed through the Church of England online portal:

<https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>

## Closing reflection

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‘O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away....

For it is you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully image. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well.’

Psalm 139.1-2, 13-14

### Consider

Reflect on these words in silence, or to music, offering to God all you have thought and felt and said in this session.

### Prayer focus before next time: Praying a Psalm

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We have concluded with some verses from Psalm 139. As you reflect on who you are before God, take this Psalm and read it at least once every day for one week.

- Before you read, sit still and open your heart and mind. Ask God to help you listen to what he is saying to you.
- Read the Psalm slowly and meditatively to yourself. Perhaps try saying it out loud.
- Let the words and images speak to you. Pause and reflect on those which strike you.
- At the end of the week reflect and note down what you have heard God saying, especially anything new or surprising.

## Opening prayer

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Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body  
now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your  
compassion  
Must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you  
Must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you  
Must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

## Case study

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Luke 2.41-52

'Now every year his [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.'

### Case study questions

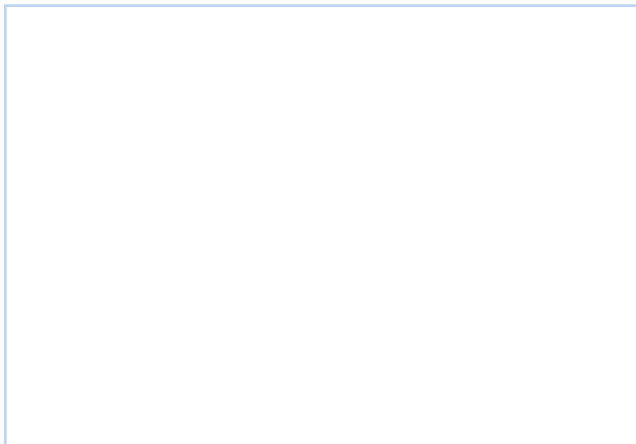
- Who do you relate to most in this gospel passage?
- How do the different characters respond to the change in their relationships?
- What would your response be to this family in your pastoral role?

## Change

Change is an inevitable part of life. Think back to your timeline from session 2.

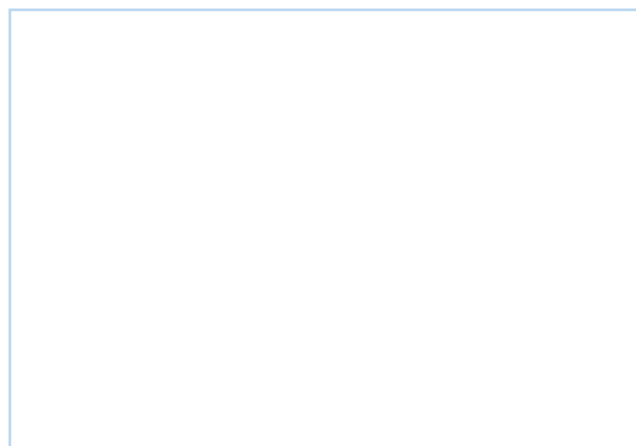
1

Can you identify the key changes in your own life?



2

What other changes might people face?



One way of looking at changes in life is to classify them into three headings: attachment, separation, and loss.

### Bible passage

**'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'**  
**John 12.24**

Jesus' words reflect the story of our own individual growth and development and our handling of change. The experience of loss, as we let go of one stage of existence for another, is inevitable. The baby leaves the warmth and security of the womb for independent life outside; the toddler is left at the play group; the adolescent seeks to establish their own identity; the young person negotiates personal and work relationships in building a home and a career; and the older adult discovers that loss of one kind or another is increasingly part of everyday life.

This separation from something or someone to whom we have been attached, can be frightening and painful. It involves change and change is something most of us resist. But negotiating change – recognising and struggling with all the difficulty of loss and separation – and finding from within ourselves that experience of new life and growth, is an integral part of life. It requires courage and it is not always easy.

Some people for one reason or another, through no fault of their own, get stuck and are unable to move on. Change is seen as something to be avoided, and they settle for the status quo. It is when loss and change are thrust upon them that a crisis may occur and help be needed.

Other people in life negotiate change more easily. They arrive, through personality and experience, at a certain detachment. Many people, some from a religious perspective and others not, acknowledge that there is gain to be had after they have worked through the pain of loss. Some would describe their experiences of loss and change as mini-deaths and find in them a preparation for the final letting go of their own death.

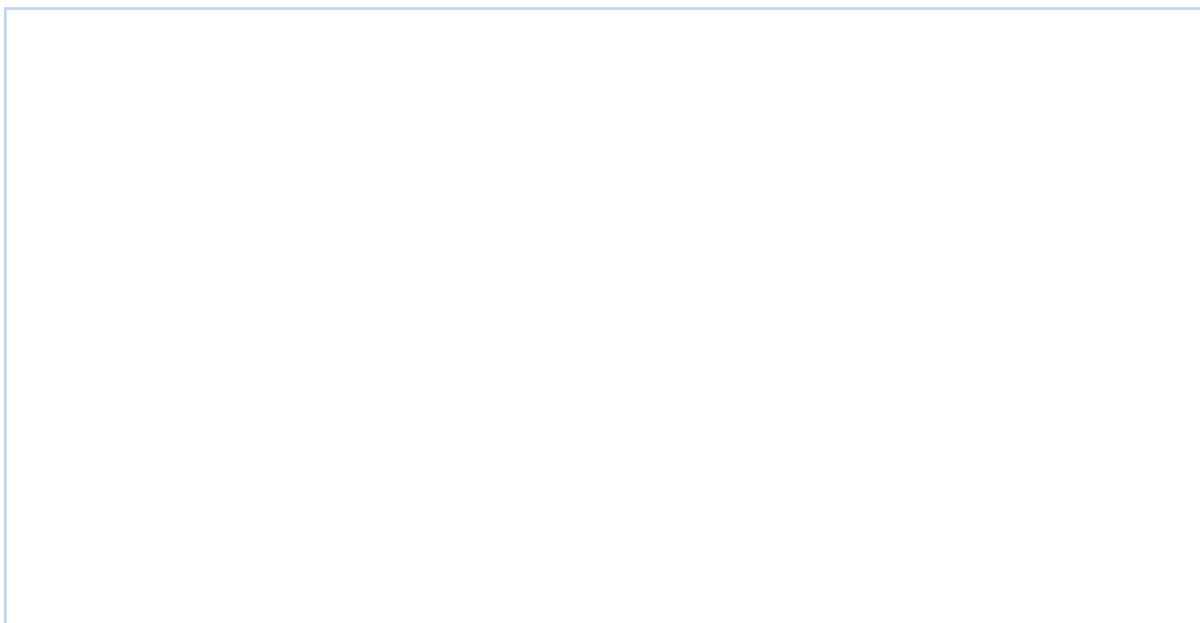
## Change continued

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Look back at your timeline from last week. Identify points of attachment, separation and loss.

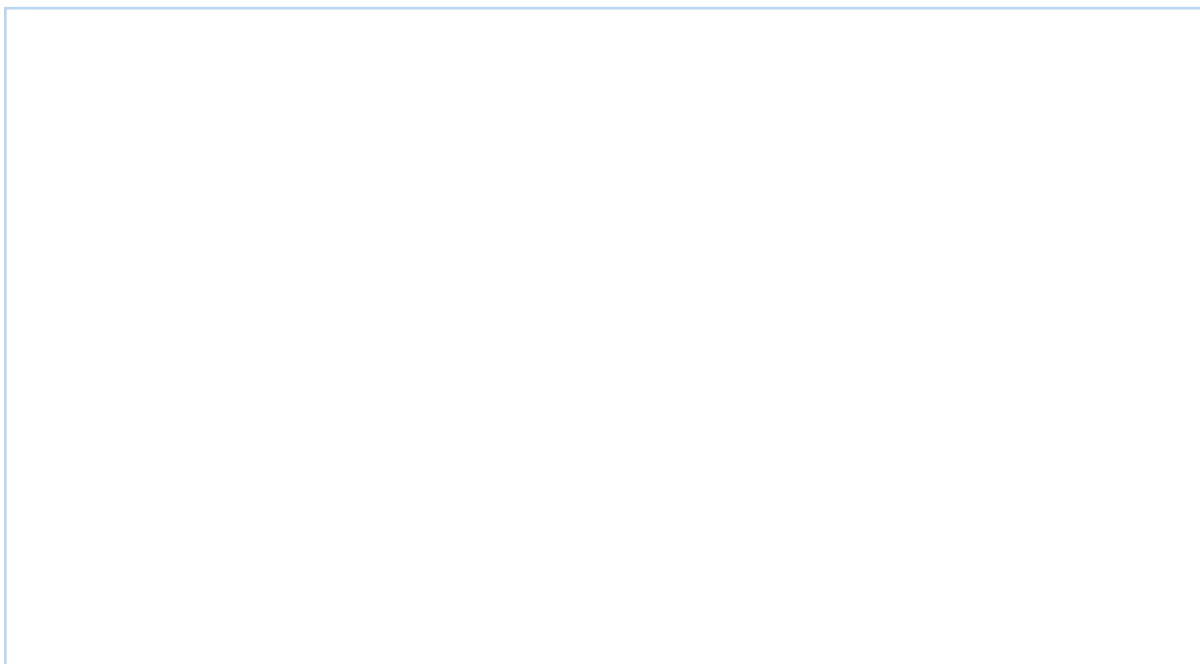
How did you respond to these?

1



Were they times of crisis or times of growth?

2



Those in pastoral ministry need some understanding of the nature and pattern of loss and change and above all, an awareness of our capacity to handle them in our own lives.

One human instinct is to see change as always negative: 'change and decay in all around I see', but we can also take a positive view: 'a change is as good as a rest.' Times of change can be times of growth both spiritually and personally.

## Models for reflecting on the journey of life

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There are a number of models and approaches that can help us when reflecting with others on the changes and growth we experience through life. Below are two of these: the Pastoral Cycle which is based on a theory of how we learn; and Fowler's *Stages of Faith* which focuses on spiritual development.

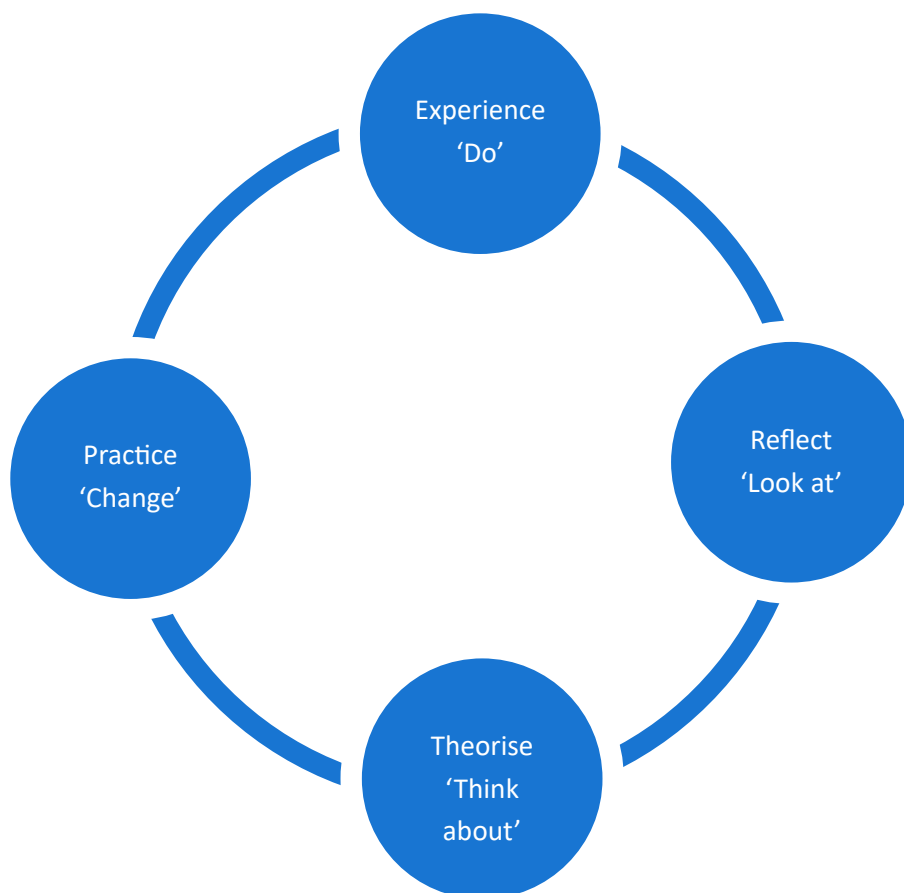
### Model one – pastoral cycle

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The Pastoral Cycle sets out in the form of a diagram one way of understanding how we deal with the experiences of everyday life.

The cycle may begin at any point: new experience; thought and reflection; new ways of thinking; changes in the way things are done.

For example, in the gospel passage we began with, Mary and Joseph had the experience of losing Jesus in Jerusalem and finding him in the temple. If we were to imagine one outcome of this story: they might reflect on their feelings of fear and frustration at losing him, their relief at finding him again, their inability to understand his answer. As they travelled home, they might have theorised about Jesus' need for more independence to study and discuss the things of God. When they returned to Nazareth, perhaps they changed their practice to allow Jesus time to spend with the local Rabbi, reading the scriptures and discussing his heavenly Father. In turn this would lead to new experiences and the cycle would continue.



## Case study 1

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Using the following case studies, apply the Pastoral Cycle to these situations. What might it look like for these people?

### Helen

Helen has a three-month-old baby called Jack. Her friends keep telling her how fortunate she is and how she should make the most of this very special time in her life. Yet Helen does not feel like that. Before she had Jack, Helen had enjoyed her job. People were always seeking her advice and she enjoyed working with the variety of different situations which every day brought. Now Helen feels that she has no-one to talk to. Her husband is in the Army and has been posted abroad. Although they talk regularly, Helen feels that she cannot admit to him how she really feels as she doesn't want to worry him. She feels lonely and is struggling with the boredom of the daily routine of looking after a small baby. Friends have suggested that she goes along to the church Toddler Group, but Helen feels like a fish out of water as all the other parents seem to be coping so well and enjoying life. She herself feels, however, that she is not coping, either with Jack or with her changed lifestyle. Some mornings she feels like pulling the duvet over her head and staying in bed. She probably would if Jack did not cry so much when he wanted feeding.

1

Helen's **experience**

2

Helen's **reflection**

3

How could Helen '**think differently**' here?

4

What could Helen **change**?

5

Could this lead to **new experience**?

## Case study 2

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### Theo

Theo was made redundant six months ago. At first, he hadn't minded. He had received a good redundancy payment and he and his partner Ryan had spent some of it on going on a cruise - something that they had always wanted to do. Now, however, they were back in Britain. Ryan already had his retirement activities well organised. But Theo had nothing to do. He had weeded the garden and cleaned the house until it looked like something out of a Homes & Gardens magazine. Yet he was bored and frustrated. When he met his former work colleagues for a drink they all seemed to be coping much better than he was. Theo really didn't know what to do. Every time he met his friends he felt depressed and got irritable with Ryan afterwards. Perhaps he should stop seeing them? But then what else did he have to look forward to?

1

Theo's **experience**

2

Theo's **reflection**

3

How could Theo '**think differently**' here?

4

What could Theo **change**?

5

Could this lead to **new experience**?

It is important to remember that the Pastoral Cycle is a 'model' which provides one way we might respond to a situation. The cycle might begin at any stage. Each stage will take different lengths of time and may come in a different order. It is not helpful to impose this cycle in an artificial way on an encounter or situation, and you certainly wouldn't want to use these terms when talking to people. It is a pattern that you might like to bear in mind when dealing with situations of change which may help people with changes in their lives.



## Model two – stages of faith

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Another way of thinking about the journey of life is in relation to the development of our faith. James Fowler in his book *Stages of Faith* (1981) identified a pattern based on stages of life. This can be helpful in understanding where people are coming from, whilst being aware of our own faith development.

Looking at the diagram on the following page (26), consider

- Can you identify these stages in your own life?
- Where would you place yourself now?
- What might be the particular concerns or needs of people at each stage?

*Below space for additional notes and thinking.*

01

#### Undifferentiated Faith

- Infancy
- Helpless, dependent, receptive
- Learning basic trust; discovering possibilities of mutuality

02

#### Intuitive-Projective Faith

- Early Childhood
- Fuses fantasy, fact and feeling
- Lack of grasp of cause and effect

03

#### Mythic-Literal Faith

- School years
- Distinguishes real from make believe
- Beginning to ask for facts and logical explanations
- Demands fairness and justice; values law and order

04

#### Synthetic-Conventional Faith

- Adolescence
- Ability to reflect on one's thinking
- Prone to conceptual idealism while sometimes judgemental of real situations and people; moral authority located outside the self

05

#### Individuative-Reflective Faith

- Young adulthood
- Critical and reflective thinking - everything subject to questioning; no longer tolerates faith at second hand
- Needs to choose and own an individual faith - may seek tidy faith or impossible simplicity

06

#### Conjunctive Faith

- Mid-life and beyond
- Learned through making mistakes; capable of living with tensions and paradox
- Enhanced empathy with others; openness to others insights

07

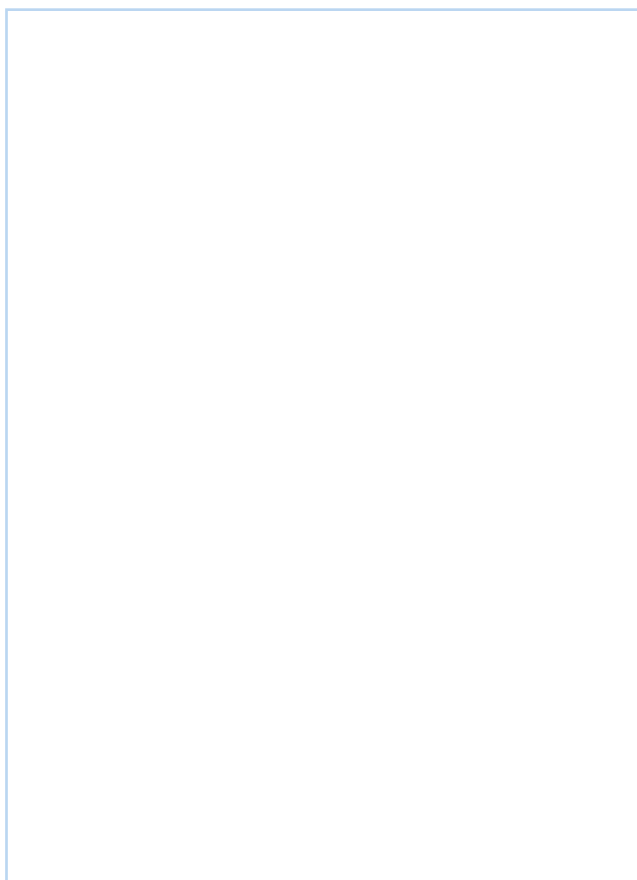
#### Universalising Faith

- Later life - rare
- Self no longer at the centre
- Life seen as a whole
- Sense of transcendence

## Questions and comments

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Following this session, make sure you give some time to reflecting on your own experiences of change and the different stages in your life, perhaps using the Pastoral Cycle. Are there other methods or strategies that you use to help you respond to change? As you reflect, hold the joys and sorrows of those times before God, and pray for those dealing with change at the moment.



## Prayer focus before next time: Praying a Psalm

---

Following this session, give some time to reflecting on your experiences of change and the different stages in your life, or a group to which you belong, using the Pastoral Cycle.

Choose one experience of change, ideally one that is still having an impact now, or that you feel is unresolved.

Slowly and prayerfully work through the four stages of the Pastoral Cycle:

**Experience:** Describe what happened as objectively as possible, and your reaction to it.

**Reflect:** 'Look' more deeply at the experience. Explore what might be behind your reaction. What role did other people play?

**Theorise:** What resources from the Bible or Christian tradition (hymns, poems, prayers etc) might you use to explore this further? Where is God in this situation?

**Change:** How might this make you think differently? What therefore might you do differently?

As you reflect, hold the joys and sorrows of those times before God, and pray for those dealing with change at the moment.

## Closing Prayer

---

Jesus, lord of time,  
**hold us in your eternity.**  
Jesus, image of God,  
**travel with us the life of faith.**  
Jesus, friend of sinners,  
**heal the brokenness of our world.**  
Jesus, lord of tomorrow,  
**draw us into your future. Amen.**

Experience

Reflect

Practice

Theorise

# Healthy boundaries in pastoral care

## Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body  
now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your  
compassion  
must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you  
must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you  
must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

## Case study

Luke 5.12-16

'Once, when he [Jesus] was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do choose. Be made clean.' Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. 'Go', he said, 'and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.' But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.'

**Various issues concerning pastoral ministry could emerge from this passage. Discuss in small groups what strikes you. Feedback one significant point from each question in plenary.**

### Case study questions

- In the context of this passage, the leper's words are often seen as a confession of faith, but sometimes people's expectations of what we can offer in our ministry become unrealistic and difficult to manage: 'If the church was really caring, you would visit me.' How does it feel to be on the receiving end of that kind of statement? When it is appropriate to say 'no'?
- Jesus sends the man to the priest to make his sacrifice. At one level he is acknowledging that there is a role for the 'professional' in this situation. In what contexts would you refer someone on to a professional?
- After this incident Jesus withdraws to pray. How do we look after ourselves in challenging situations?

## Why are boundaries in pastoral care so important?

As we have seen and will see in a variety of pastoral situations (such as loss, or spiritual difficulty) sometimes the issue or the need which is first presented to you as a pastoral minister may not be the full story, or the main need. It may be easier for people to ask for a visit or to discuss a problem that seems more 'acceptable', or they may not have acknowledged to themselves the true situation, for all sorts of complex and valid reasons.

Those in pastoral ministry sometimes work with people who are vulnerable and going through challenging times of life. They often support people with emotional and mental health needs. This session will give an insight into the psychological reasons why boundaries are an essential element to Pastoral Care. It will examine why people can become dependent on pastoral support and will give an opportunity to explore how to set and maintain appropriate boundaries.

### Consider

In pairs, (remembering your group's confidentiality agreement) discuss your experience of boundaries in pastoral care. Where have you seen them put in place and how well were they handled.

## Psychological development

In order to understand boundaries and why people become dependent on pastoral support we have to begin with an understanding of how the human personality develops. The first five years of a child's life are critical for their future. This is the time when a person's core psychological development takes place. How a child is treated and situations that they are exposed to shape the way their brain grows. Therefore, even if these events are not remembered, these early year experiences affect the adult that they grow to become.

For some people, their core emotional needs were not met during their early years and as a result they develop to be adults with ongoing emotional needs and may struggle with their mental health. In these situations, the needs are likely to be long-term, deeply engrained and these people may become dependent or reliant on support offered. Therefore, it is important to think through and establish good boundaries when working with people with long-term emotional and mental health needs. If you have a team of people working with the same person, it is important that these boundaries are the same for everybody. The boundaries that you may put in place when working with someone with long-term emotional or mental health needs may be different than when working with someone who is experiencing an unusual period of difficulty, maybe due to short period of physical illness or grief. However, in both cases boundaries are important to protect yourself, the individual, and also the wider needs of the church community.

## Five core emotional childhood needs

---

All children have the same core needs to develop healthily. When these needs are not met, children can develop longer term emotional and mental health issues. It is important to note that this can occur as a result of well-intended parenting as well as a result of abuse or neglect, so it is important not to make assumptions about people's past. The needs listed below are critical to childhood development, but we never grow out of these needs and continue to have them as adults.

01

### Secure attachments to others

Attachments start from the moment the baby is born; the key attachment is formed with the main caregiver. This relationship initially gives physical safety and enables the child to start its development in a stable environment. The relationship is also a place of nurturing where the child is able to grow and develop in a loving and caring environment.

02

### Autonomy, competence and sense of identity

The secure attachment, once in place, allows the baby a safe environment in which to start to develop a basic sense of identity, make basic decisions which develop into future autonomy and increased competence. The core need for autonomy is developed when a child is allowed to do age-appropriate tasks and receive non-critical feedback. Being able to make mistakes and learn from them is an important element of this need.

03

### Freedom to express valid emotions and needs

When a secure attachment is in place, the child then has a safe and secure environment in which to experiment with the expression of emotions and begin to understand their own needs. This need is not met if a child is given the message that expressing emotions is bad or unacceptable.

04

### Learning and expressing yourself through spontaneity and play

Play is how children learn and develop life skills. Spontaneity within play fosters a learning environment in which the child begins to learn boundaries. The core need for spontaneity and play also gives children the opportunity to have fun and be silly, rather than taking everything seriously.

05

### Realistic limits and self-control

Through spontaneity and play the child then begins the process of understanding and interpreting the world around them. This core need is met when the parenting allows children to develop self-control, self-discipline and taking responsibility for one's actions. Neither of the extremes of very few boundaries or over-controlling, strict parenting, allow this core need to be met, which includes the learning of what is acceptable behaviour. The child begins to test boundaries and through that they learn self-control.

## Development of core beliefs

---

If the five core emotional childhood needs are not met, children begin to form maladaptive core beliefs about the world around them and the people they meet. As the child grows and their personality develops, they begin to interpret the world through this lens and if certain patterns are repeated the interpretation is reinforced. This development is largely unconscious and over time it begins to inform everything around it, not just what it originally related to. As an example, a core belief formed by a caregiver hurting a child, becomes a mistrust of everyone and an adult expectation that other people will hurt or abuse them.

In some cases, the development of these core beliefs will have provided a protective factor to a child. However, as an adult the core belief becomes debilitating and prevents healthy relationships from forming. Deeply entrenched patterns seen in adults often become central to one's sense of self. Therefore, challenging the core belief challenges not only the behaviour, but the very core of the person's identity. This is why core beliefs are so hard to break and challenging them may lead to a person feeling rejected. If someone feels rejected by a person who has in some way represented the church, then they may see this rejection as also a rejection by the church and God.

As pastoral ministers it is important that you establish good boundaries from day one with the people you visit. Without clear boundaries the individual does not know what the limits are to the pastoral care you are providing and so without realising it you may trigger or exacerbate the person's maladaptive core beliefs. A typical example of this would be a pastoral

minister offering a significant level of support to someone initially but realising that they cannot sustain the same level of support over a long time. Reducing the support to make it more manageable is perceived by the person as a rejection. The person has a maladaptive core belief that others will abandon them. Therefore, with the best of intentions, but sadly a lack of initial boundaries, the end result is the person believing that, just like everyone else, the minister has rejected them and so too has God.

### Case study

---

A member of your church congregation calls you on a daily basis in tears. She tells you that she finds life difficult and is struggling to cope without your support. You are also aware that she is seeking support from multiple congregation members.

*Questions on following page.*



1

What impact does this have on you?

2

What impact do you think this will have on the wider congregation?

3

What boundaries do you need to put in place to manage this situation?

4

Do you think your answer would be different if you were already commissioned as an LPA or chaplain?

## Maladaptive core beliefs

---

As humans we all have maladaptive core beliefs to some degree but for some people, they are so debilitating that they prevent healthy adult relationships from forming. Below are some examples of maladaptive core beliefs. This is not an exhaustive list and is only included to give you a basic understanding. As pastoral ministers your role is not to diagnose or provide professional care. However, being aware that these core beliefs are likely to be deeply entrenched is important. Even with professional support, people can find it difficult to change how they perceive the world and other people. Therefore, setting good boundaries in pastoral care is essential both for you and the individual you are supporting.

Abandonment	A perceived instability or unreliability of these who support the individual.
Mistrust & Abuse	An expectation that others will hurt, abuse, humiliate, lie, cheat or manipulate the individual.
Emotional Deprivation	An expectation that a normal degree of emotional support will not be adequality met by others.
Defectiveness	Feeling that one is defective, bad or inferior.
Social Isolation	Feeling that you are different from the rest of the world.
Dependence	Belief that one is unable to handle everyday responsibilities in a competent manner without considerable help from others.
Vulnerability	Exaggerated fear of imminent catastrophe. This could be internal, such as a fear of some dreadful medical or emotional situation. Or it could be external such as fear of a car crash or that the individual will be victimised.
Enmeshment	Excessive emotional involvement with one or more significant others (often parents), at the expense of normal social development.
Failure	Belief that one has failed, or will fail.
Entitlement	Belief that one is superior to others and is entitled to special privileges that go beyond societal norms.
Insufficient Self-Control	Pervasive refusal to exercise sufficient self-control.
Approval-Seeking	The need for the approval of others at the expense of one's own needs in order to gain love.
Subjugation	Excessive surrendering of control to others to avoid anger, retaliation or abandonment. Example: Domestic Abuse.
Unrelenting Standards	Belief that one must meet very high internal standards of behaviour and performance, usually to avoid criticism. Perfectionism.
Negativity/Pessimism	Focus on the negative aspects of life. Glass half empty.
Emotional Inhibition	Maintains a calm, emotionally flat demeanour. Avoids situations in which people discuss or express feelings.
Punitiveness	Belief that people should be harshly punished for making mistakes. Angry with those who don't meet standards.

Because maladaptive core beliefs are formed as an individual grows from childhood into their adult self, they form part of their personality and identity. This means that if these beliefs are triggered it can leave a person vulnerable. The individual may respond with one or more of the following coping mechanisms.

- Aggression
- Hostility
- Self-harm
- Manipulation
- Exploitation
- Dominance
- Overcompensation
- Recognition-Seeking
- Impulsivity

- Substance abuse
- Compliance
- Dependence
- Excessive Self-Reliance
- Psychological Withdrawal
- Social Isolation
- Avoidance

In some cases, a person's maladaptive core beliefs can become so debilitating that they affect their whole life and all the relationships they form. If this is the case, a psychiatrist may diagnose them with a personality disorder. As pastoral ministers your role is not to diagnose, but if you have any concerns about an individual, please speak with your incumbent.

## Case studies

*Split into groups and discuss one of the following case studies. Feedback to the wider group so you can all reflect on the two case studies.*

01

One Sunday morning you notice a visitor in the congregation who is tearful and appears distressed and the vicar asks you to offer support to her. Following a conversation with her, it becomes apparent that she has recently moved to the area following the death of her husband. She tells you that she is lonely and has no support.

02

A man from the congregation has been turning up on your doorstep late at night expressing thoughts of self-harm. The last few times you have given him a cup of tea and offered support; however, you are realising that this is becoming a frequent pattern.

### Case study questions

- What support do you think you should offer?
- In light of the support you will offer, what boundaries are appropriate to put in place?
- What risk factors might you want to consider?

### Case study questions

- How would you address this?
- Who else might you need to involve in this situation?

## Keeping everyone safe

---

**If you are concerned for your own or someone else's immediate safety ring the Police on 999.** In other serious circumstances, where you do not require an immediate emergency response, use the national police helpline, **101**, where your query is more likely to receive the proper response. In some circumstances you might also want to talk to your Parish Safeguarding Officer or a Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor.

Don't forget to seek support for yourself in these circumstances. You should be meeting regularly with a supervising minister and/or a support group, but do contact someone as soon as possible if you encounter any of these issues, or have questions in these areas.

Tell someone where you are going. If you are concerned, either go with another person or meet in a public place. On entering a room be aware of hazards. When sitting in a room think about how to keep yourself and the other person safe. If you are in a position of power, it is good practice for the other person to be closest to the door, but if you are worried for your safety be aware of how you might escape or call for help.

As we come to the conclusion of this session it is important to remember if you are ever uncomfortable with what you are being asked to do in your ministry you can say 'no'. You are part of a team and even if you are the only pastoral minister in your church, you are still part of a team with your incumbent. The overall responsibility for pastoral care always remains with the incumbent.

It is important for all pastoral ministers to have an understanding of how the personality is formed in order to understand why boundaries are so important. Boundaries may initially come across as hard or uncaring but ultimately you are helping to protect the wellbeing of the person, yourself and the other ministers in your church.

## Closing prayer

---

Keep a time of silence, holding before God those undergoing difficult situations at the moment.

The love of the faithful Creator  
The peace of the wounded Healer  
The joy of the challenging Spirit  
The hope of the Three in One  
surround and encourage you  
today, tonight and forever. Amen.

Galloway *The Pattern of our Days* (1996)

## Prayer focus before next time: Praying for healing

---

The conversations in today's session may have recalled painful memories for you. Spend some time quietly bringing those memories into the light of God's love. You may also want to pray for others in emotional pain who have come to mind in this session.

# Developing listening skills

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

## Case study

The third [visitor] skilfully deflates his weakly smiling victim  
By telling him  
How the lobelias are doing,  
How many kittens the cat had,  
How the slate came off the scullery roof,  
And how no one has visited the patient for a fortnight  
Because everybody  
Had colds and feared to bring the jumpy germ  
Into hospital.  
The patient's eyes  
Ice over.  
He is uninterested  
In lobelias, the cat, the slate, the germ.  
Flat on his back, drip-fed, his face  
The shade of a newly dug-up Pharaoh,  
Wearing his skeleton outside his skin,  
Yet his wits as bright as a lighted candle,  
He is concerned only with the here, and now,  
And requires to speak  
Of nothing but his present predicament.  
It is not permitted.

(from 'Ten Types of Hospital Visitor' by Charles Causley)

### Case study questions

- What does the patient want from his visitor?
- How might his visitor have become aware of and met those needs?

## Learning to listen

---

Listening is at the heart of pastoral care. Teresa of Avila's prayer doesn't speak about the 'ears' of Christ, but to truly listen to people is one of the greatest gifts we can offer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *'The first service one owes to others in fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as the love of God begins with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.'*

### Please note

- Sharing with one another will be an important part of this session, but you must decide how much or how little to share. No one is under any pressure to say more than they feel comfortable with.
- Whatever is said within the group sessions is to be treated in accordance with your group's confidentiality agreement (see p.1).
- Remember! Listening is an important way of valuing other people and understanding them.

### Listening exercise 1

---

Divide into pairs. For one minute one person in each pair tells the other person about something which has happened during the last week.

The 'listener' does their best to ignore them and (without speaking) communicates inattention and lack of interest.

The pairs now change roles. Come back together to discuss:

1

How did it feel not to be listened to?

2

How hard was it to keep speaking?

3

How easy or hard was it to really ignore someone?

## Listening exercise 2

---

For one minute one person in each pair tells the other person about 'a happy day'. The listener is not allowed to interrupt but shows that they are giving their full attention by their facial expression and body language.

The pairs now change roles. Come back together to discuss:

1

How did it feel to be listened to with attention?

2

How easy or hard is it to give encouragement to someone without using words?

## Good listening

---

We are listening all the time – but in different ways. The Acorn Foundation (an organisation focused on Christian healing and listening) describes three broad types of listening:

### ME-focused listening

one-sided, listening to get information for myself

### WE-focused listening

everyday conversation; mutual exchange of information and feelings

### YOU-focused listening

for when someone really needs to talk about something which is troubling them. We put our own needs aside to give them the time and space they need

### What characterises good 'YOU-focused' listening?

#### Not judgemental

In a pastoral context of you-focused listening, you are not there to criticise or comment. You are offering by your presence an opportunity for someone to be heard. If they feel you might be judging them, they may not say what they need to say.

#### Not directive

In an interview situation for example, you might use leading questions to achieve the information you want. In contrast, during a pastoral encounter, open questions help people think for themselves. E.g. not 'That must have been shocking' or 'You must have thought God had abandoned you' but 'How did that make you feel?'; 'Where do you think God is in this situation?'

#### Hard work!

You need to prepare well and be self-aware when you are listening to someone. You also need to make sure you look after yourself (we will look at this more in later sessions).

## Jesus as a listener

---

Matthew 20.29-34

‘As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him [Jesus]. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’ The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, ‘Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!’ Jesus stood still and called them, saying, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, let our eyes be opened.’ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.’

1

What stands out for you about Jesus as a listener here?

2

What does Jesus do to enable good listening?

## Active listening

---

An important part of good listening is listening to what isn't said as much as what is. This can include paying attention to body language, noticing silences and pauses, and listening for the feelings which are expressed behind the words. These can help you as the listener to discover what is really going on in a situation.

How you respond in a listening situation involves skills that need to be developed and practised. ‘Active’ listening involves feeding back to the person what you think you have heard, to help them in their reflection and exploration. Rather than directing their thoughts or decisions, it is a way of making the situation clearer, and allowing them to acknowledge what is really going on, perhaps below the surface. The following exercise will help you to practice this skill.

### Listening exercise 3

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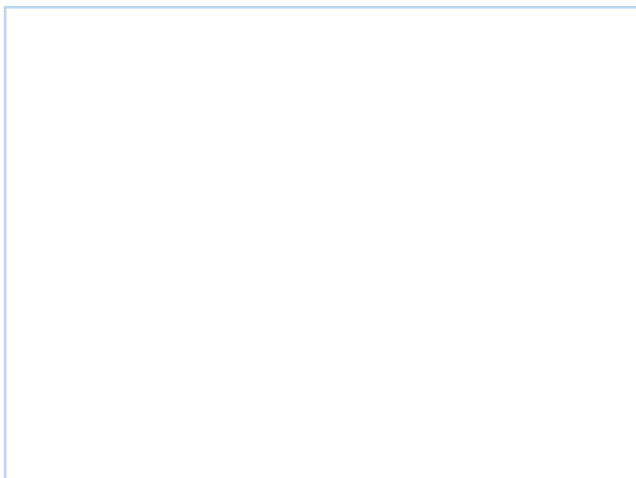
- For the first three minutes one member of the pair needs to tell the other about something that has given them pleasure.
- The listener must keep absolutely quiet during this time, but must focus on what is being said and the words that are used which carry feelings.
- The listener now needs to reflect back to the speaker what s/he has just said, paying particular attention to including the ‘feeling’ words in this reflection.
- The partners now swap roles. This time, as well as keeping quiet and reflecting back using feeling words, the listener needs to ask the speaker how s/he feels having shared their story.



Come back together.

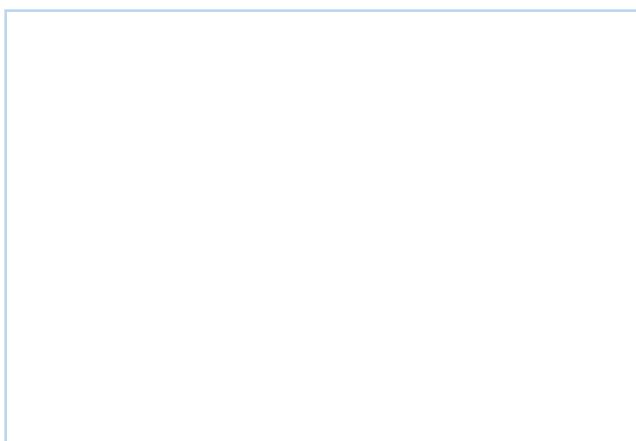
1

How did it feel not to be listened to?



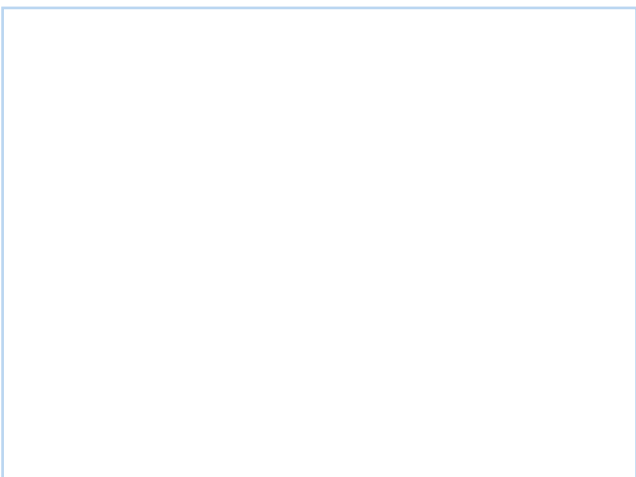
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Did you notice anything about the way that words were reflected back?



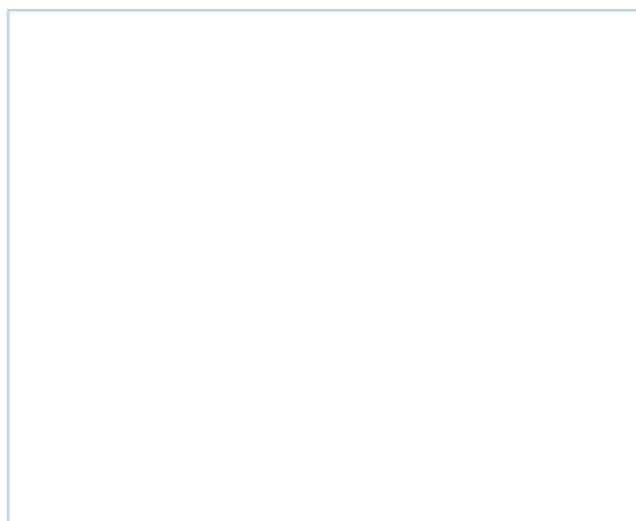
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Did you recognise the story that came back to you?



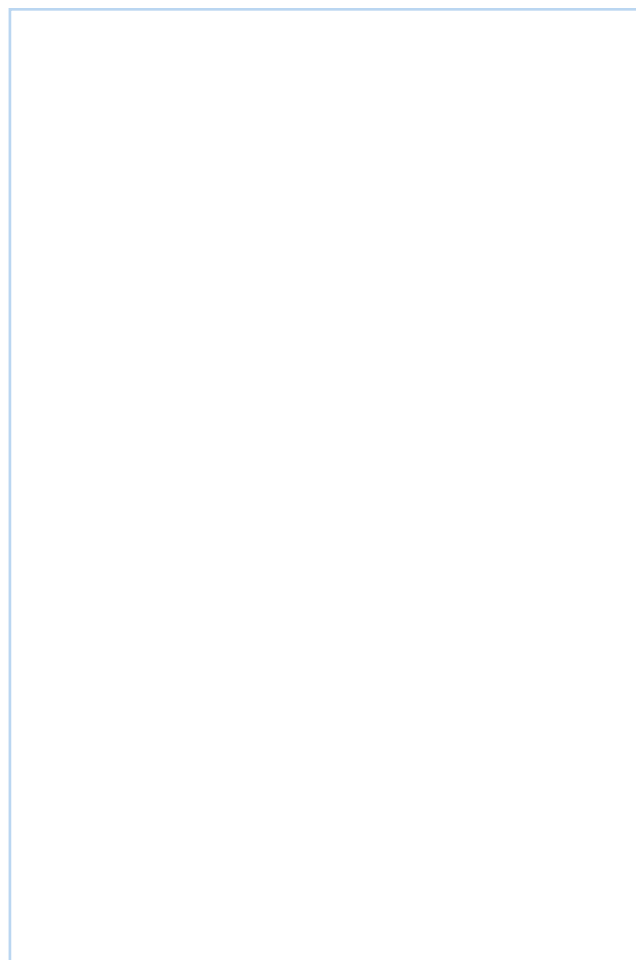
4

How did it feel to listen?



It takes practice to listen actively in a way that feels natural, so do take opportunities to try this out. As the course progresses, use the discussion prompts to practice your listening skills with each other.

*Below is space for additional thoughts*



## Some unhelpful listening habits

---

You may have come across some of these habits which are not conducive to good listening:

### Juggling

Listener is distracted, trying to do several things at once, and missing subtleties

### Pretending

Listener doesn't want to know (perhaps for good reasons) but is trying not to upset the speaker

### Hurrying

Listener tries to get the speaker to 'get on with it' – they may even try to finish a sentence or fill in a word in their impatience to move things along

### Rehearsing

Listener starts listening but switches off because they are thinking about what to say in response

### Fixing

Listener feels they must give a solution, perhaps before they have heard what the problem really is

1

Which of these have you noticed in your own listening?

## Summary of good listening

---

- Listen with undivided attention, without interrupting. Make sure you hear what is actually said and not what you expect to hear or think you ought to hear.
- Listen to the way it is said, the rush of words, the slow and hesitant speech, the long pauses, broken sentences, the tone of voice.
- Listen to the 'base-line' – what is not openly said, but possibly being felt. Watch for any discrepancy between what is said and the way it is said.
- Watch for non-verbal clues to help you understand feelings.
- Help yourself and the other person to feel comfortable and relaxed with each other, even when you don't feel calm. Watch your own body language, how you sit and hold yourself.

**Note: It is important to emphasise that it has been impossible to do more than scratch the surface of effective listening and that to do it full justice a more in-depth course could be followed.**

2

What techniques could you use to avoid these characteristics?

## Closing prayer

---

The Lord God almighty is our Father: **He loves us and tenderly cares for us.**

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Saviour: **He has redeemed us and will defend us to the end.**

The Lord, the Holy Spirit, is among us: **He will lead us in God's holy way.**

To God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
**be praise and glory today and forever.**  
**Amen.**

## Prayer focus before next time: Silent meditation

---

Listening to others begins with listening to God. Silence can be difficult and unusual for us, but many Christians find silent prayer a vital part of their spiritual life. Try to find at least 15 minutes every day for silent prayer.

- Sit comfortably and still your mind. It may help to concentrate on your breathing
- Repeat a word or phrase such as 'maranatha' (which means Come Lord)
- Let go of all thoughts and imagination
- When distractions come, acknowledge them and put them aside
- There is no specific outcome for this form of prayer – it is simply about being with God.

There are numerous apps and websites to support meditation but remember, as all teachers of prayer say, there is no replacement for prayer, not even reading about prayer!

# Engaging with families

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

### Bible passage

**'People were bringing little children to him [Jesus] in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.'** Mark 10.13-16

### Consider

- Imagine this incident taking place in your community today. Who would you most identify with?
- In what ways does the Kingdom of God 'belong' to children?
- How does your church's or chaplaincy's work with children and young people express this?

## Encountering children and young people

'Children have a natural sense of wonder about God. It is through relationships and experiences that we nurture this tender heart towards God and the things of God. Love, consistency and trust form the fertile soil for their image of God to grow into a healthy relationship and a firm foundation for faith' Jody Capehart in *'Nurturing Spiritual Development and Prayer in a Child'* (2011)

In the Gospels, Jesus demonstrates value, nurture, and hospitality towards children. He shows they are significant in the Kingdom of God. He places children in his midst and rebukes those who were seeking to prevent this.

Think about how and when you might encounter children and young people in your ministry. You might not be actively involved in 'children's work' but that doesn't mean you won't meet them as part of your pastoral ministry.

Growing Faith is the national movement that exists to put children, young people and families instinctively at the heart of all the mission and ministry of the Church. It involves churches, schools and households working together to help children, young people and families have life in all its fullness. [www.salisbury.anglican.org/missionandministry/growing-faith/](http://www.salisbury.anglican.org/missionandministry/growing-faith/)

## What is a family?

---

Howard Clinebell (Methodist minister and pastoral counsellor 1922-2005) defines family as “The social system of primary relationships from which individuals derive their major psychological and spiritual nurture”.

The picture that comes to your mind when the word ‘family’ is used may be closely connected to the family structures you have experienced in your life. Unconsciously, we may then assume that this is the template for ‘a family’, but in fact we will encounter many different kinds of families, including those with multiple parents and/or step-parents, adoptive families, same-sex parents, single-parent families and extended families of all kinds.

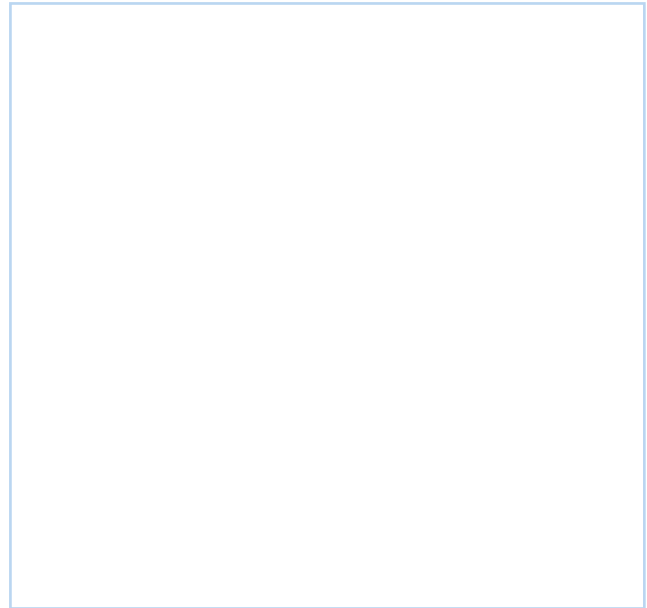
What qualities make a family life-giving?

Here are some suggestions:

- Stable relationships
- Nurturing for every family member
- Involving quality relationships beyond the immediate family circle
- Able to respond and deal with difficulties
- Unconditional love & acceptance
- Spiritually aware
- Sharing experiences together
- Accountability
- Provides structure, boundaries and support

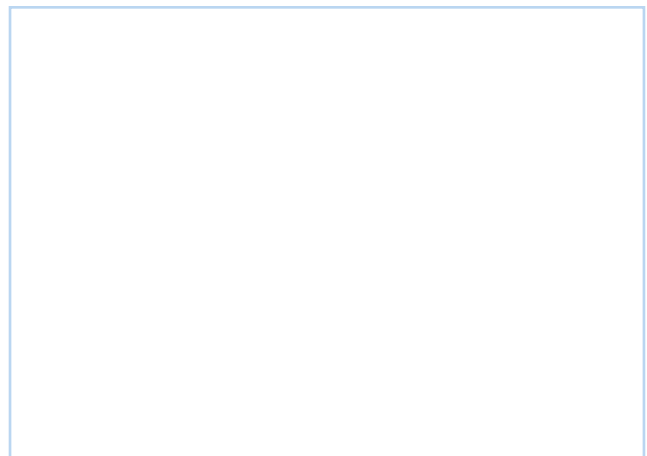
1

What other qualities can you think of?



2

How can we support those who have not experienced this kind of family?



Following the closure of church buildings during the pandemic, and recognising the need for faith and spirituality to be part of everyday family life, the Church of England developed an online resource to support families in being church at home: [www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-home](http://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-home). You may wish to browse the resources in your own time and consider whether they might be of relevance to your pastoral ministry.

## Family life today

---

What are three important things you remember about your childhood and upbringing?  
(These could be positive, negative or neutral)

1

2

3

Do you think today's children would have similar answers? What might the differences be?

When we stop and reflect on changes in family life in our lifetimes, we can see that there have been a range of events, pressures and advances that bring about a different experience of life for those growing up or parenting today. Think, for example, of:

- Patterns of work for both men and women: It is not unusual for both parents to be working, but since the pandemic there have been increased opportunities for home and flexible working. What pressures or advantages might that bring?
- Attitudes to sex, marriage and gender: Think about how these have continued to develop both in wider society and in many churches.
- The pandemic: 'The period that followed the closure of schools in March 2020 was easily the most disruptive in children's education since the start of the Second World War.' ([instituteforgovernment.org.uk](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk))
- Technology: Children today have the world at their fingertips, as mobile phone, tablets and online video games give them access to people and information across the world. How can parents help them to benefit and not be harmed?
- Awareness of abuse: Much that was hidden in years past is becoming known. What effect has this had on relationships between church and families? [safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org](https://www.safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org)

## Case Study

Alanna's story: 'I went to church on Sunday. It was the first time I'd tried attending a service with my two-year old. We haven't had him christened yet, and when I rang the vicar about it, she suggested I bring him to church and talk to her afterwards. But she didn't tell me it was going to go on for over an hour! Noah hates sitting still at the best of times, and he wouldn't stop running up and down and squealing. When I tried to get him to sit still and look at a book he just screamed and screamed. I didn't know what to do. In the end I just gave up and took him home – it was all so stressful.'

Jean's story: 'I went to church on Sunday. It was the first time since my brother's funeral and I was feeling a bit fragile. Hoping for some consolation I suppose. There was a sweet little boy there with his mum, but he made an awful lot of noise and I couldn't really hear the service. I felt sorry for her, but I didn't like to look round in case she thought I was judging her. I would have said hello afterwards, but she was gone by then.'

### Consider

- What responses would you make to Jean and to Alanna?
- How would you enable the church to hear their voices?

## Engaging through schools

For some congregations, one of the challenges in engaging with children and young people is that they are not often in church on a Sunday morning. As pastoral assistants or chaplains you can be part of seeking out other opportunities. The most obvious of these is through schools and especially church schools.

### Consider

- Can you identify the schools in your parish or community? Are they primary (aged 5-11) or secondary (11-16 or 11-18)? What is their relationship to the church?

Here are some examples of common ways that churches can engage with local schools. You may be able to share others from your context. You don't need to be a commissioned minister to be part of these things but they could become part of your pastoral ministry with children and young people.

### Visits to church

As part of the RE curriculum, schools will study places of worship. One helpful way to do this is to visit the church, and it is good to have members of the church present to help welcome the children or young people and show them around.

Schools may also come into church for seasonal services, such as Harvest, Christmas, Easter and Summer. Families can also be invited to these services.



## Visits to school

Most schools (especially Primary schools) welcome volunteers from the local community to help read with pupils or to support the school in other ways. Secondary schools often value input from mentors, or one-off assemblies on particular issues.

### Consider

- School staff have pastoral needs too. How could the church offer support to school staff as well as engaging with pupils?

## Breakfast or after-school clubs

Primary and Secondary schools often have clubs for children who need to be dropped off earlier in the morning, as well as extra-curricular activities after school. Churches (or halls) next to a school could develop a partnership to offer this.

## School Governors

The role of a governor is an increasingly important one, and requires a significant commitment. In church schools Foundation Governors represent the local church, but all schools need people with skills and expertise from the community to be on the governing body.

## Things to remember

Working with schools offers a wonderful opportunity to engage with children and young people, as well as the teachers and staff. It is important to recognise that a school is an organisation in its own right, with its own values and priorities. There are points of convergence as we have noted, as well as boundaries to be aware of:

### Opportunities

- Daily collective worship is a requirement in all schools
- There is increasing emphasis in OFSTED inspections on spiritual development, and church schools have an additional inspection under SIAMS
- Involvement and engagement with the local community is also part of the inspection criteria

### Boundaries

- Schools work to a timetable and curriculum specifications
- Schools will have their own policies for safeguarding which you will need to comply with
- As a visitor you shouldn't be left on your own with children – staff should be responsible for control and discipline

## Safeguarding

It is important to be aware of issues around safeguarding children and of domestic abuse. All those engaged in ministry on behalf of the church will need to keep up to date with understanding on these subjects as it develops. The National Safeguarding Team of the Church of England have produced some helpful online courses, which they regularly update.

If you have not recently done so, register on Safeguarding Training Portal ([cofeportal.org](http://cofeportal.org)) and complete the Basic and Foundations Safeguarding courses as well as 'Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse'.

## Closing prayer

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Father God, from whom every family in earth and heaven is named, we thank you for the rich variety of the families you have created for us, and for the relationships which we see and enjoy within them. Help us to respect and learn from each other, that we may come to maturity in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

## Prayer focus before next time: Praying for a family

---

Ask a family if they would be happy for you to pray for them. Ask them some general questions about their family and what they would like you to pray for. If they are a person of faith, where do they see God in their family life? Try to talk to as many of the generations and different roles as you can.

Commit to praying for them regularly, perhaps for two weeks. Don't forget to go back and find out how they are getting on. (You may find they and you would like to continue this on a longer term basis.)

*Below is some space for you to jot down any prayers you'd like to make.*

# Coming alongside those with illness or disability

## Prayer

---

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

## Case study

---

Sue is in hospital for a hip replacement. She has been waiting for the operation for a long time. She has been getting around with her stick and had got used to the discomfort and pain. But now she has finally had the operation and is recovering on the ward.

Brian has had a series of falls recently and the last one has done some serious damage. He has been in and out of hospital many times as his Parkinson's has worsened, and now he is having his hip replaced.

Mary has had a riding accident and has some broken ribs. Her hip was fractured in several places and so she had an emergency operation in a matter of hours, and the hip was completely replaced. This is her first serious injury and her first stay in hospital.

### Consider

- What factors would you bear in mind as you enter the hospital to visit these people?
- What might be the same and what might be different?
- How might each of these people be responding to their operation?

## Listening to experience

---

Think back to an experience you have had of illness. In pairs take it in turns to describe the experience for 4 minutes, and to practice your listening skills. As you recount the incident, try to respond to these questions:

1

How did it feel when you were ill – what emotions did you experience?

2

How did you respond to these feelings?

3

What did others do that you found either helpful or unhelpful?

In pairs again, discuss a time when someone close to you was ill. Again, explore:

4

How did it feel when the person close to you was ill – what emotions did you experience?

5

How did you respond to these feelings?

In his book, *A year lost and found* (1987) Michael Mayne reflects on his experience of ME:

‘Having seen me in public some people assumed I was well again. That was an indication of problems to come: how you ease yourself infinitely slowly back into the life of the community, without raising expectations you cannot hope to meet. ‘How are you?’ – never the easiest of questions to answer – soon becomes by implication, at least in the sick person’s ears, ‘Why are you not better?’

1

What can you learn from your reflections and from Mayne’s experiences?

2

What are the things which you will endeavour to do, and which words or approaches will you avoid in your pastoral ministry?

## Bible study

---

### Mark 10.46-52

‘They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.’

### John 5.2-9

‘Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.’

## Consider

- What are the differences between Bartimaeus and the man at the pool in their attitude to their illness?
- How does Jesus respond to these two men?
- What assumptions do we make about people's responses to illness?
- How might the experience of illness be different for someone with acute illness (e.g. in hospital for a broken leg) or chronic illness (e.g. diabetes) or a progressive illness (e.g. Parkinson's)?
- What issues might there be with the language we use to talk about illness or disability?

## What are the issues which concern people who are ill or disabled?

Here are some answers people in varying situations have given:

- Anxiety
- Vulnerability
- Anger
- Guilt
- Pain
- Family worries
- Job worries
- Helplessness
- Being patronised
- Loss of control
- Loss of dignity
- Loss of identity
- Self-image
- Learned helplessness
- Practicalities, e.g. using a phone if you are deaf!
- Being labelled!
- Transport
- Loss of sustaining community
- Isolation
- Powerlessness
- Fear of death
- Are you understood?
- Are you allowed to be yourself and express negative feelings?
- Sexuality
- Money worries
- Politics (most noticeably in area of disabilities)

This is not meant to be a comprehensive list. Nor will all these issues be true in the case of every person you know who is sick or disabled. Notice that many of these issues are ones which cause us concern at some time in our lives – whether we are feeling well at the time or not! However, such things as pain and/or long term chronic ill health can affect our ability to cope with certain issues which we might normally be able to deal with when we are feeling well. And many disabled people say that it is the attitudes and structures of society which disable them more than their medical condition.

1

What would you add to this list?

- in a new routine with earlier mornings and nights
- without much privacy from nurses, doctors or other patients
- without much control over when things happen
- without immediate contact with day to day events at home or work
- much more aware of body functions (much ward conversation is about operations, bowels or stitches) and of the dependency of life upon a body that is wearing out
- confronted by the suffering (and sometimes death) of other people in a very direct and immediate way
- in a different dimension of time, which can pass very slowly

2

What would the list look like for a carer? How could your church or organisation offer support?

3

What would you do when visiting someone in hospital to respond to these factors, or to help to mitigate them?

## Being in hospital

---

**In small groups discuss the experience of being in hospital, thinking particularly of the changes that happen to a person.**

**You might think about being:**

- confined to one place, often to one room
- in a strange bed, harder than at home with potential difficulty in going to sleep
- in nightclothes all day
- in the company of strangers for most of the time

‘We don’t have to understand a person’s illness to care for them. What we can do is to be human and share our common humanity with the patient. This simply means hearing a person’s story. We can’t assume that this has fully taken place in a hospital; patients tend to get asked questions rather than be given the freedom to just talk about what is on their mind. Jesus began with Legion by finding out his name. Our visit brings a touch of normality and continuity with the community, and that is so important to a person when they find themselves in a strange place.’ Merrington (2012) p.64

## Mental illness

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‘Mental health problems are widespread, at times disabling, yet often hidden. People who would go to their GP with chest pains will suffer depression or anxiety in silence. One in four adults experiences at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any given year. People in all walks of life can be affected and at any point in their lives, including new mothers, children, teenagers, adults and older people. Mental health problems represent the largest single cause of disability in the UK.’ From a 2016 report by the independent Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England.

1

What have you noticed or experienced about mental health problems since the pandemic?

3

How does your church or chaplaincy support those suffering mental health problems?

## Case study 1

---

Kay recently lost her husband and is caring for her elderly mother who lives with her and is suffering from the early stages of dementia. Kay used to play an active part in the community and attend church regularly but now rarely leaves her home except to do her shopping. She is becoming increasingly isolated and depressed.

### Consider

- Think about the support that could be offered to Kay in looking after her mother.
- How could Kay be enabled to return to church?
- What can the church offer Kay’s mother?



## Case study 2

---

Tim is in his mid-twenties and has been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. He experiences severe mood swings and his behaviour can be unpredictable. He has few friends and has been unable to hold down a job, having dropped out of college when his symptoms first started. The church has become an important focus for Tim and he is passionate in the way he worships and expresses his beliefs. However, his behaviour during services can be unsettling for others.

### Consider

- Think about how to help members of the congregation to better understand Tim's mental health issues.
- Consider whether it would be appropriate to discuss Tim's behaviour with him, giving careful thought to how such a conversation might be viewed by Tim.
- What practical help could be offered Tim to enable him to make friends and perhaps find a job that he would enjoy?

This is only a very brief introduction to the issues around mental health. In many cases, it will be necessary to direct people on to professional support. There are many helpful websites providing information and support – for example [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk). From a church perspective, see [www.churchofengland.org/resources/mental-health-resources](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/mental-health-resources).

Consider whether local Mental Health First Aid Training might be helpful for your team. Organisations such as St John Ambulance or MHFA England offer a variety of suitable courses.

## Spiritual difficulties

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**'The question 'How are you?' is at root a metaphysical question, which is not sufficiently answered with clinical lists and data... but goes to the deepest part of ourselves as the complex and uniquely precious beings we are.'** Mayne (1987) p.22

As commissioned ministers of the Church of England you can play a valuable role in responding to the people you meet in a 'holistic' way, aware of the needs of body, mind and spirit. Spiritual difficulties may be completely separate from physical illness, but equally one may be a factor in the other. It is helpful to be aware of some of the signs, but as always be careful of jumping to conclusions. If you feel someone is in serious difficulty or danger, or is suffering from mental illness, you cannot respond to the issues yourself and will need to refer them on to professionals.

As Merrington comments in the earlier quotation, the best gift you can offer as a pastoral minister is to listen, and to offer that person to God in prayer. We will discuss further in Session 10 the considerations of when and how to pray with people.

## Signs of spiritual pain/suffering

### Emotional

- Restlessness/agitation/anxiety
- Denial of illness or of reality of prognosis
- Anger
- Fear
- Powerlessness and loss of control
- Depression/flat affect mood
- Dreams or nightmares

### Behavioural

- Refusal to take pain medication
- Power struggles with caregivers or family
- Puts self in unsafe care position
- Frantically seeks advice from everyone
- Active forms of self-harm
- Loss of independence
- Lack of engagement with activities that bring comfort or joy
- Withdrawal/isolation
- Questions about 'why' or duration of dying process
- Statements about 'not wanting to be a burden'
- Metaphorical or symbolic language suggesting distress or unresolved concerns
- If history of religious practice/affiliation, refuses religious leader or stops practice

### Physical

- Unrelieved pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sleeplessness

### Other signs

- Conflict between the goals of palliation and religious beliefs
- Fixation on nutrition, herbal remedies, or miraculous cure

## Wholeness and healing

---

This ministry is not something extraordinary, but a deepening and development of what is always at the centre of the Gospel. The healing ministry is Jesus' ministry entrusted to us, always to be exercised with reverence, love and compassion. The guiding principle is to recognise the presence of God in those receiving this ministry and honour his presence in them.

Di Beaumont, a former LPA involved in wholeness and healing ministry writes, 'The way in which the healing ministry is undertaken may take many forms. Every Christian is called to pray. Asking for God's help for ourselves or others, asking for infilling with the Spirit, intercessions in Church or in private prayers are all part of the healing ministry in its widest meaning. When undertaking any form of pastoral work those in ministry touch upon wholeness and healing. It may be stating the obvious but when praying expect something to happen! God does not always answer our prayers in the way expected. It is suggested that perhaps the best way to pray is to bring the person/situation before God and leave them/it in His loving care, to do His will. This approach can bring astounding results. However, there is also a more formal aspect in the healing ministry. If your calling is to the wholeness and healing ministry then this needs careful discernment.'

**For more information, speak to your incumbent. Further reading: *The Church of England report A Time to Heal (2000)* Church House Publishing.**

## Closing prayer

---

God, heal the dullness of our hearts,  
that we may listen and hear,  
look and indeed perceive.  
Use your power to restore our world.  
Let all people know your healing touch.  
May the least and the greatest experience  
your healing.  
Bless us always with someone to care.  
Send us anew to proclaim your kingdom  
with authority and power to heal.  
Open our eyes and soften our hearts,  
that understanding and healing will be ours.  
Take away, God, our hardness of hearing,  
our blindness that cannot see,  
Gift us with listening, understanding hearts.  
Let us turn to you and be healed. Amen.

***Gunstone Healed, restored, forgiven (2004).***  
**Norwich: Canterbury Press.**

## Prayer focus

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There are many ways of praying with the Bible. Ignatian spirituality (drawn from the work of Ignatius of Loyola) invites us to imagine ourselves into the Bible stories in order to encounter Jesus in a new way. We will use the story of the healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10.46-52) as we continue to reflect on the experience of illness. You might like to try this several times or use the same approach with another passage.

First read the whole passage, then break it down into sections.

Vs 46. Imagine the scene a dusty road outside Jericho with a large crowd. Where are you in the scene – on the side of the road, in the middle of the crowd? Are you a disciple, a passer-by, a beggar like Bartimaeus? What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell?

Vs 47-48. You hear Bartimaeus calling out. What is your reaction? Do you tell him to be quiet? Are you intrigued or shocked or disinterested?

Vs 49-50. What happens when Jesus stops? What do you think about his response? What impact does Bartimaeus movement have on the crowd?

Vs 51. Did you hear Jesus' question? What did it make you think?

Vs 52. How do you respond to Bartimaeus' healing? What do you think about him joining the crowd of followers? What do you do now? Where are you in the scene? Imagine Jesus turns to you. What does he say to you? What do you say to him?

*You can use the space below and on the next page to note down your answers.*

*Additional space for notes*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for taking notes. It occupies the majority of the page's vertical space.

# Valuing later life

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

### Case study questions

- What assumptions lie behind Claire's behaviour? Are they correct assumptions?
- What are Gladys' desires and concerns? How could Claire respond to these?
- What are the assumptions you bring to visiting older people?

## Case study

Claire goes to visit Gladys who has had a fall recently. When she arrives, Claire doesn't ring the bell, but walks straight in, to save Gladys coming to the door. Gladys thinks she hears someone coming down the hall so calls out anxiously, 'Who's there?' and struggles to get up out of her chair. Claire waits until she reaches the lounge and sees where Gladys is to say, 'Hello Gladys, how are you? You must be really frustrated that you had a fall. Are you terribly bruised? Never mind, dear, a cup of tea will soon sort you out. You just sit there and I'll be back in a minute.' Gladys starts to say that she can make the tea, but Claire has already gone. She soon comes back with the tea, and starts to talk about what happened at church on Sunday, and some new people who had just moved to the area. Gladys tries to share her thoughts and experiences from arriving at the church a few years ago, but Claire has already moved on. 'I don't know why I am bothering you about all this, dear. How is your knitting going?' Gladys replies, 'Well I am rather worried about my arthritis – it is getting more and more difficult to use my hands.' 'That's all right' Claire replies, 'you've done your bit over the years – you can enjoy watching the television now.' Gladys was going to say that she has knitted a jumper for all her grandchildren, and she is worried that she won't be able to do it for the next one who is due in 3 months. Instead, she starts to ask Claire if she could help her put some new polish on her nails, but she says, 'I must be off now, I will see you again soon' and is gone.

## Attitudes to ageing

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The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), which resources and promotes spiritual care in later life, says 'Increasingly, many older people are feeling that they are beyond the interest and concern of their wider community and even, sometimes, their church. There is a growing focus on youth and young families, to the extent that being an older person can be isolating as well as challenging.'

[www.annachaplaincy.org.uk/vision](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk/vision)

Below are a number of words and phrases that are used to describe older people.

- Elderly
- Older person
- Pensioner
- Crone
- Sage
- Senior citizen
- Golden oldie
- Elder
- Aged

1

What do they reveal about our attitudes?

2

Are some more appropriate/inappropriate than others?

3

What are your own feelings about getting older?

## Bible study

---

In groups of three or four look at one of the selections of verses below (making sure each of the selections is covered overall). These verses all relate to old age. As you read them reflect on the way these passages reflect the anxieties or frustrations of old age, and what they say about its blessings and rewards?

**Examples of old people:** Abraham and Sarah, Genesis 17.15–19; Isaac Genesis 27; Eli, 1 Samuel 4.12–17; Elizabeth, Luke 1.5–7, 36–37; Simeon and Anna, Luke 2.25–38

**Sayings about old age:** Psalm 71, Proverbs 17.6; 20.29; 22.6; 23.22, Ecclesiastes 11.8–12.8

**Promises relating to old age or the old:** Job 5.26, Ps 92.12–14, Isaiah 46.3–4, Joel 2.28–29 (see also Acts 2.17), Zechariah 8.3–5.

Verses concerning ‘elders’ in the church: 1 Peter 5.5, James 5.14, Revelation 4.4.

Come back together to share your reflections. How might these verses shape your approach when visiting older people?

## Attitudes to ageing

---

**'It has been said, 'God gave us memories that we might have roses in December. I am sure there is much in that, but roses often have thorns, and we can hurt ourselves if we do not handle them with care and love. The passing years have put their marks on us, made us what we are and each one of us has a wealth of experiences unique to us.'** Margaret Cundiff in Albans (ed) *Old in years and young in soul*, Derby: Methodist homes for the aged (2003).

One of the most important factors when engaging with older people, as with any demographic group, is not to assume that everyone's reactions will be the same. What does it mean to be elderly? Age UK has volunteers helping the 'old people' who are well into their 80s themselves. Just as we all respond to the circumstances of our lives differently, so some people will welcome the time to rest and receive ministry from others, while some will want to keep active for as long as possible and resent being 'done to'. It is important to be open to the gifts, experience and stories that older people can bring, while respecting their decisions about what they offer. For example, Merrington (2012) reminds us that 'It can seem degrading to suggest that the elderly can pray because they can't do anything else.' Some people may offer the gift of prayer, but others may have many other skills and gifts to offer through teaching and inspiring others, through keeping skills active that they have known all their lives, or through learning new skills. For some, retirement is a wonderful opportunity to develop new interests, or to devote time to family or hobbies they have always loved; for others it is a dreaded time of emptiness and disempowerment. We need to be aware of what is lost and what is gained for individuals going through these sorts of transitions.

In all of this, there can be a temptation to see only the 'old person' in front of us and to forget the many years of experiences and memories that make up the person. At times, all somebody needs to feel valued is to be allowed to tell their story.

1

What do you think will be important gifts or memories for you in later life?

2

What would help you to use and express these?

3

What are the painful memories, and are there things that have helped you deal with these?



## Health and ageing

---

It is undeniable that as we get older, there are some conditions and illnesses that are more likely to develop, and these can present challenges to healthy living. But everyone is an individual and will have their own particular set of issues, and will respond in different ways, so it's important to listen, and to try to understand some of the challenges that people are living with, from their perspective, as we discussed in our previous session.

One of the big issues often associated with ageing is dementia, a set of symptoms that over time can affect memory, problem-solving, language and behaviour.

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia-guide/pages/about-dementia.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia-guide/pages/about-dementia.aspx)

Many churches have joined the Dementia Friends network launched by The Alzheimer's Society

[www.dementiafriends.org.uk](http://www.dementiafriends.org.uk), which encourages people to raise awareness and understanding, as well as offer practical help and support.

## Spirituality of ageing

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'I pray by remembering. It is my experience that despite all the evidence to the contrary, in deep remembering there is hope. Deep remembering can be holy ground' Colin Semper in *Old in years and young in soul* (2003).

In *The Stature of Waiting* (1982), W.H. Vanstone discusses our preoccupation with keeping active or being 'useful' and contrasts this with Jesus' experience in the Passion of being 'handed over' and 'waiting, in the agony of expectancy for whatever it is that He is to receive.' He suggests that instead of seeing humanity as 'fellow-worker

with God' this should be balanced by a sense of being a 'fellow-receiver'; that the image of God is seen in us as much in our passive lives as our active lives.

James Woodward calls the dependence of old age 'an instance of the profound dependence at the heart of creative existence', and points out that whenever we say the creed we declare this deep dependence on the divine goodness for our very existence. It is in an awareness of this dependence that people still have the potential to be transformed by 'a hope in something beyond the material limitations of life and a sense that existence is not in one's own hands.' *Reimagining the Theology of Old Age in Spiritual Dimensions of Ageing* Johnson and Walker CUP 2016.

1

How helpful are these reflections for a spirituality of ageing? What reflections would you add?

2

What prayers or ways of praying might be particularly helpful for those in later life?

## End of life

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Personal growth and healing often occur at the end of life. Although a terminal illness may be perceived or experienced primarily as negative or devastating, for many persons it becomes an opportunity for personal growth and healing. In its Greek origin, the word 'crisis' includes a sense of possibility and connotes opportunity.

However, spiritual growth does not diminish suffering. The fact that some healing happens does not diminish the very real suffering experienced both by the person who is terminally ill and by their family.

What precipitates personal and spiritual growth at the end of life?

01

As persons are less able to engage in life activities due to functional limitations, they have time for spiritual reflection and spiritual practice

02

Dependency, loss, fear, and suffering lead many persons to turn to (or return to) their religious tradition for meaning, strength, and comfort

03

Individuals may take emotional and spiritual risks they would otherwise avoid

04

Because family members will not have another opportunity with their loved one, they may seek healing, connection, and reconciliation

05

Facing death evokes spiritual questions (about forgiveness, afterlife, the value of life itself) not normally asked in the course of daily living

In writing about the tasks that are part of an older person's final years, Erik Erikson identifies two in particular which concern us here:

- Putting one's past in order
- Becoming reconciled to death

It is perhaps hard to imagine asking as direct a question as, 'What is it important for you to do before you die?'

Nevertheless it is helpful to think of ways of raising it, directly or indirectly. The ways in which it is answered will say a lot, both about the things that must be done as well as about those things someone wants to do. The importance of 'putting one's past in order' implies that we need to help residents to explore whether there are any emotional loose ends that need tying up. It might be as simple as saying 'thank you', 'I love you', or 'goodbye!' to a friend. It might go deeper and involve an attempt to put a wrong right. This can help people to let go of old hurts or regrets and help them to achieve a sense of peace.

If death is seen as part of life, then these final wishes are as much about the living that people have shared, and their relationships, as they are about the reality of dying. Some residents might want to leave written or recorded messages of courage, wisdom or love for their families and friends, others might simply want to explore the options for their funeral and make detailed plans in advance. The Final Lap Methodist Homes (MHA) [www.mha.org.uk](http://www.mha.org.uk)

## Consider

- How do you see the practical and spiritual elements of the end of life being related?
- Is one more important than the other?
- In what ways might you be part of these processes?
- How would you support a person preparing for the end of their life, and their family?

## Closing prayer

Faithful God,  
you have promised in Christ to be with us to the end of time.  
Come close to those who have lived long and experienced much.  
Help them to continue to be faithful and, within the all-age kingdom of God, to find ways to go on giving and receiving your grace, day by day.  
For your glory and your kingdom.  
Amen.

*(BRF Anna Chaplaincy Prayer)*

## Prayer focus before next time: Praying with the Bible

Another approach to praying with the Bible comes from the Benedictine monastic tradition and is known as lectio divina (holy reading). This involves reading slowly and listening for a word or phrase that strikes you, then using that phrase to lead you into prayer. There are four stages, (Reading; Meditation; Prayer; Contemplation) each accompanied by a slow, careful reading of the passage. Scripture is God's 'living word' and is one of the ways we can hear God speaking to us. You are encouraged not to worry about doing a 'Bible study' of the whole reading, but to listen to what God is saying to you this time through Scripture.

- Read Luke 2.25-38 ideally out loud slowly
- Notice a word or phrase which stands out for you
- Read the passage again
- Meditate on the phrase. What questions does it raise? Why has it struck you?
- Read the passage again
- What prayer would you offer in response to this phrase?
- Read the passage again
- Let your phrase and prayer lead you into contemplation, resting in God's presence

*Below is space for additional notes*

# Our role at a time of loss

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion  
Must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you  
Must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you  
Must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake. Amen.

## Opening

Death is often considered something of a taboo in our society. In small groups, see how many euphemisms for death and dying you can think of (you might like to look at the title of this session to get you started!).

### Case study questions

- What strikes you from Andrew's account of his own grief?
- What role could you play in encountering someone like Andrew?
- Imagine that Andrew had 'run away' from his grief, and you met him in your pastoral role several years later. What might be the signs that something needed addressing? How might you begin to engage with his situation?

## Case study

### 'Bereavement counselling helped me to move forward'

When his wife and children were killed in a road accident, Andrew Gitsham was left with two choices. 'I could sit there, paralysed, doing nothing with my life, or I could pick myself up and try to move forward.' Realising he could not do that without support, he contacted the Huntingdon branch of Cruse Bereavement Care. 'Someone came to my house and for the next 18 months she was a constant in my life. She made me realise that my grief was a normal reaction,' Andrew said.

### 'Run away'

'The day after the funeral I suddenly realised that I was alone,' he said. 'I was there in a house that less than a week ago was busy with children, and with just living. The silence was deafening. Everywhere you looked there were reminders.'

'I knew right then that I had to do something about it for my own sanity,' added Andrew. 'I could run away from it but eventually it would find me. I made the decision that I was going to turn and face it, and whatever came my way, came my way. But I needed support to do that.'

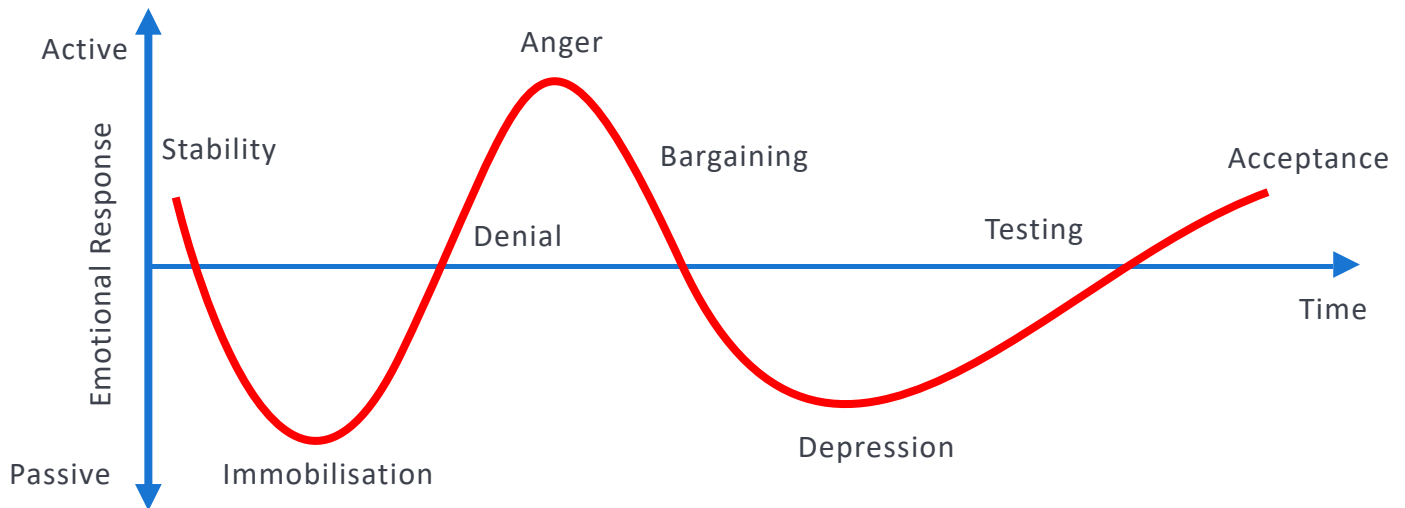
### 'Healing'

When Cruse Bereavement Care sent 'a little old lady' to Andrew's house, that was the start of the healing process. He explained the importance of talking to someone objective. 'Family and friends will listen, but they have their own memories as well – you know, it wasn't all about me,' he said. 'There's an enormous ripple-effect. I was the figurehead because I had lost everything but there were other people in need too.' ...'I think I was looking for someone to say that feeling this way was normal, because at the time you feel so abnormal. You feel a bit of a freak really.' ([BBC article](#))

## Different models of grief

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The five stages of grief identified by Kubler-Ross in *Death and Dying* (1969) have almost become a cliché and applied to any number of situations. However, they were offered as a way of helping to understand grief, not as a prescriptive pattern people must follow. It can be a helpful way of being aware of why people react to loss in the way they do.



**Shock** Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news

**Denial** Trying to avoid the inevitable

**Anger** Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion

**Bargaining** Seeking in vain for a way out (often shown in trying to negotiate with God)

**Depression** Final realisation of the inevitable

**Testing** Seeking realistic solutions

**Acceptance** Finally finding the way forward

*Note: Stages 1 and 6 were added to Kulber-Ross' original theory.*

Another approach has been suggested by William Worden. This focuses not on the reactions of the grieving person, but on their 'tasks'. This comes from an understanding that grief is something that we 'do' rather than something that just 'happens' to us.

Experience	The bereaved person needs to	Theme
<p><b>The first reaction may be</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If death is unexpected, disbelief</li> <li>• Numbness or collapse</li> </ul>		Shock /denial
<p><b>In the first few days there is often</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of unreality, everything seems remote, like a dream</li> <li>• Or a feeling of behaving like a robot</li> <li>• Control both by the bereaved and by family and friends to ensure socially appropriate behaviour, e.g. at funeral</li> </ul>	'take in' the reality of the death	Control
<p><b>In the weeks ahead</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often very painful and very frightening</li> <li>• Very strong emotions, often unpredictable and hard to manage</li> <li>• Outbursts of weeping, complaints or aggression</li> <li>• Sometimes there is a feeling of being out of control</li> <li>• The bereaved person is under great strain, so is often irritable</li> <li>• Energy is absorbed in maintaining 'normal' behaviour and not being overwhelmed by emotion</li> <li>• Hence there is little energy for inter-action with world around</li> </ul>	'let go', to risk losing control and experience the pain of grief	Pain and suffering
<p><b>At a later stage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person who has been bereaved begins to free him/herself from the image of being a mourner,</li> <li>• and begins to take action for the future</li> <li>• the dead person becomes less central in thoughts</li> <li>• feeling for reality is regained</li> <li>• alternatives between times of coping with life and times of apathy or despair</li> </ul>	find a life worth living again to adjust to life without the person who has died	Adaptation
<p><b>Later still</b> the active processes above continue, and attacks of apathy and despair diminish</p>	reinvest in other relationships	Acceptance

‘For in grief nothing ‘stays put.’ One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral?

But if a spiral, am I going up or down it? How often – will it be for always? – how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, ‘I never realised my loss till this moment’? The same leg is cut off time after time.’  
C.S. Lewis *A Grief Observed* (1961).

### Consider

- How do you relate to these different models of grieving?
- Do they apply to your own experience of grief and what you have seen in others?

Remember that **children and young people** need support too. They will experience the same sorts of feelings as adults, but may express them differently.

## Guidelines for engaging with people dealing with loss or grief

---

These suggestions are provided by Cruse Bereavement Care, one of the major sources of support for those dealing with loss.

### Do:

- Be there for the person who is grieving – pick up the phone, write a letter or an email, call by or arrange to visit
- Accept that everyone grieves in their own way, there is no ‘normal’ way
- Encourage the person to talk
- Listen to the person
- Create an environment in which the bereaved person can be themselves and show their feelings, rather than having to put on a front
- Be aware that grief can take a long time
- Contact the person at difficult times such as special anniversaries and birthdays
- Mention useful support agencies such as **Cruse**
- Offer useful practical help

### Don't:

- Avoid someone who has been bereaved
- Use clichés such as ‘I understand how you feel’; ‘You’ll get over it; ‘Time heals’
- Tell them it’s time to move on, they should be over it – how long a person needs to grieve is entirely individual
- Be alarmed if the bereaved person doesn’t want to talk or demonstrates anger
- Underestimate how emotionally draining it can be when supporting a grieving person
- Make sure you take care of yourself too

## When and how to talk about faith?

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### John 14.1-6

‘Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’

### 1 Thessalonians 4.13-end

‘We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.’

### Revelation 21.1-4

‘I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was

no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

1

What answers to the question ‘What happens to us when we die?’ are offered by these passages?



2

Which do you feel most comfortable with?

3

How would you answer the question 'Is he/she in heaven?'

There are many biblical images of death and the 'afterlife'. It is important to be aware of what images and understandings you are working with, as well as what those you encounter may believe or expect.

4

Would you talk about God with the people below? If so how and when? Would you offer to pray with them?

- John whose wife has died aged 45 leaving him with 2 young children
- Shirley, a regular churchgoer throughout all her life whose son-in-law has committed suicide
- Anya, who has come to faith recently and is reflecting on her mother's death 5 years ago

Be careful not to fall into clichés such as 'God needed another angel in heaven.' Remember God is always present, and we should hold every encounter in prayer whether silently or out loud.

## Unnoticed grief

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As we saw in session 3, loss does not necessarily refer to the death of a loved one. Many different events of life can be experienced as bereavement: moving house, divorce, a new job, unemployment. You may find in supporting people through these experiences you notice many of the signs of grief, and will be journeying with people through a similar process.

In a similar way, the reaction to one form of loss (e.g. children leaving home) may be linked to another form of grief. An unexpectedly strong reaction to something such as the death of a pet, or an occasion of national mourning may signal the resurfacing of an old grief, or a bereavement that was hidden or displaced. One interpretation of the outpouring of grief at Princess Diana's death was that it allowed an expression of mourning for those for whom it had been culturally unacceptable.

'Getting over it so soon? But the words are ambiguous. To say the patient is getting over it after an operation for appendicitis is one thing; after he's had his leg off is quite another. After that operation either the wounded stump heals or the man dies. If it heals, the fierce, continuous pain will stop. Presently he'll get back his strength and be able to stomp about on his wooden leg. He has 'got over it.'

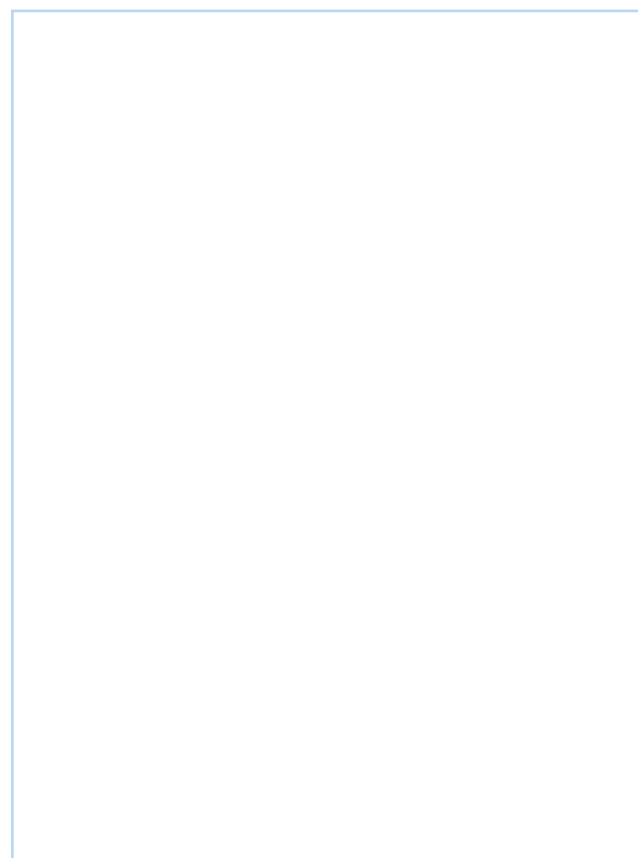
But he will probably have recurrent pains in the stump all his life, and perhaps pretty bad ones; and he will always be a one-legged man. There will be hardly any moment when he forgets it. Bathing, dressing, sitting down and getting up again, even lying in bed, will all be different. His whole way of life will be changed. All sorts of pleasures and activities that he once took for granted will have to be simply written off. Duties too. At present I am learning to get about on crutches.

Perhaps I shall presently be given a wooden leg. But I shall never be a biped again.'  
C.S. Lewis *A Grief Observed* (1961)

Lewis' words are a reminder that grief never completely disappears.

1

Who are the people you might encounter in your pastoral role who may have this kind of 'wooden leg'? How would you know?



It is worth bearing in mind that older people who are living on their own and 'lonely' will often be grieving the loss of a partner.

Be aware too of the effect someone's death will have on people beyond the immediate circle. Especially as family structures become more complex, there may be relatives from previous relationships who are left out of the grieving process. Such grief may manifest itself in different ways as it is not allowed to be expressed as bereavement.

## Models of bereavement care

---

What is the current practice and structure of bereavement care in your parish/benefice/ministry team?

1

Do pastoral assistants play a role in an annual service of remembrance of those who have died? (Usually around the All Souls/Remembrance time of year)

2

What are the other difficult times of year when you could provide support to those who are bereaved?

3

Has your church or chaplaincy considered a 'Blue Christmas' service? (e.g. [http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/blue\\_christmas.htm](http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/blue_christmas.htm))

4

What other ideas have you come across?

## Closing prayer

---

Let us pray with confidence to God our Father, who raised Christ his Son from the dead for the salvation of all.

Grant, Lord, that your servants may know the fullness of life which you have promised to those who love you.

Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Be close to those who mourn: increase their faith in your undying love. Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

May we be strengthened in our faith, live the rest of our lives in following your Son, and be ready when you shall call us to eternal life. Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Show your mercy to the dying; strengthen them with hope, and fill them with the peace and joy of your presence. Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer.**

Lord, we commend all those who have died to your unfailing love, that in them your will may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with them in your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## Prayer focus before next time: The communion of saints

---

An important part of the Christian hope in the face of death and loss is that through the death and resurrection of Christ we are united with the communion of saints on earth and in heaven. When we pray, we join our prayers with all those members of the mystical body of Christ.

As you continue to reflect on your own experience of death and bereavement and how we can be alongside those experiencing pain today you might find these scripture passages and prayers helpful. As you pray (or sing!) try to imagine that you are joining the endless stream of worship and prayer on earth and in heaven.

Another way this is expressed is through the pattern of the Daily Office derived from the monastic tradition in which prayers are offered around the world at least morning and evening. Even if someone is praying alone, there in a sense in which they are joining with many others praying in a similar way.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

Almighty God,  
you have knit together your elect  
in one communion and fellowship  
in the mystical body of your Son Christ  
our Lord:  
give us grace so to follow your blessed  
saints in all virtuous and godly living  
that we may come to those inexpressible  
joys  
that you have prepared for those who  
truly love you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

# Ministry matters

## Prayer

---

Lord Jesus, teach us that you have no body now on earth but ours;  
No hands but ours;  
No feet but ours;  
Ours are the eyes through which your compassion must look out upon the world;  
Ours are the feet with which you must go about doing good;  
Ours are the hands with which you must bless men and women now;  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.

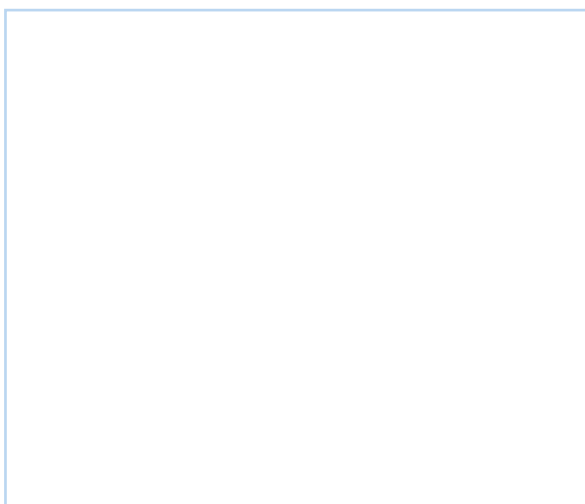
## Our diocesan vision

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**'To make Jesus Christ known in every place so that all might flourish and grow, seeking His Kingdom, here and now.'**

1

How do we think our pastoral ministry will contribute to making this vision a reality?



## Case study

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**Luke 10.1-11 (See also Mark 6.6b-15; Matthew 10.5-14; Luke 9.1-6)**

'After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

1

What can we learn from this passage about our pastoral ministry? What are the points of connection? What are the parts that are irrelevant or inappropriate to your situation?

2

The disciples were 'appointed' and 'sent ahead of Jesus'. They were not going out in their own right, but as part of the 'mission' of Jesus (the Latin root of 'mission' means 'to send'). When a commissioned pastoral assistant or chaplain arranges an encounter, it is as part of the ministry of the church; they are sent as a disciple of Jesus. How does this affect how you approach a visit or meeting?

3

Jesus sent the disciples out 'in pairs'. In your ministry will you meet with people on your own or with someone else? What are the advantages and disadvantages? When might you not visit on your own?

4

'Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals': The disciples went out in a position of weakness, suggesting an attitude of humility. In what sense in your ministry do you come carrying nothing? What are the dangers of thinking that you come bringing the 'answers' or a solution, or even bringing God?

5

Jesus' words remind the disciples that the presence and peace of God go ahead of them. 'If anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person'. Have you experienced this sense of God at work in a situation before you arrive?

6

If a place is not welcoming to the disciples, they are to 'wipe off the dust in protest'. Are there times when we have to acknowledge that our ministry is not welcomed or helpful? When do we need to be realistic about moving on?

7

Regardless of the response to the disciples they still proclaim, 'The Kingdom of God has come near'. This is the core of the mission of Christ, expressed not as a future hope but as a present reality. What does the Kingdom of God mean to you? When you visit, how is the Kingdom of God made more visible; how are people opened up to feel that it is close to them?

## The practicalities of pastoral encounters: When, why, how and what next

---

In this next section we look at some of the practicalities of planned pastoral encounters. We use the term 'visit' as shorthand for these, but recognise that they may not always be visits to the person's home – there may be good reasons to meet up in another place such as a public venue or chaplaincy base.

1

When might a visit be necessary? What might initiate it?

In practical terms, there could be several ways a visit might happen.

- Somebody might ask for a visit themselves.

2

Do you have a system in your place of ministry for people to request a visit through a named person, or with a card in church?

- Somebody might ask for a visit on behalf of a friend, relative or neighbour.

3

Are there any issues involved in responding to this?

- The incumbent or another member of the ministry team might ask you to visit someone.

4

Do you know what the procedure and expectations are in this situation?

Once you have received a request, how do you arrange the encounter?

It is good practice to make contact with the person as soon as possible after you receive the information, even if you can't meet with them straightaway. In most cases, the best way is to make a phone call to discuss when and where they would be most comfortable meeting; don't assume that will be their home as there may be pastoral and social reasons why they might prefer a different space. Bear in mind the different patterns and commitments people will have. In some cases (especially hospital visiting and visiting somebody in a care home) you may not be able to contact the person directly, but will need to make appropriate arrangements with the place they are staying. For some people, talking on the phone is very difficult due to deafness, or mobility, and it may be easier to 'drop in' even if that is to arrange another time.



## Why?

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It is important to be aware of the different expectations and assumptions behind a visit, and to have your own boundaries in place.

## Case study

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Martin spoke to the vicar on Sunday and asked whether someone could come and see him before he goes into hospital for a major operation next week. The vicar told him that one of the pastoral assistants would be in touch. Having received a form via email from the vicar with the details, you ring Martin to arrange a time.

- What is your sense of why you are there: To assist the vicar? To offer a listening ear? To pray for strength and peace? To bring healing? To show the love and care of God? To show the support of the church?
- Why does Martin think you are there: To pray for him and lay hands on him? To give comfort and strength before he faces the operation? To find someone to give him a lift to the hospital? To talk about his sister who died after a similar operation five years ago? To have a chat and a cup of tea, assuming that the vicar must be coming later in the week to say some prayers?
- Why does the church and/or the incumbent think you are there?

*Write your answers to the side.*

## How?

---

There is an important difference between 'sympathy' and 'empathy'.

Sympathy means feeling the same feelings as another person but it has come to mean 'feel sorry for' for someone.

Empathy means identifying oneself with the feelings of another and seeking to understand them. The word has come to be used in the sense of 'feeling alongside' another person.

In pastoral ministry we need to feel both sympathy and empathy but need to avoid the kind of feeling sorry for someone which makes them the object of pity and diminishes them. It is in situations like this that it is easy to say 'I know how you feel'.

Empathy can remind us of how important the feelings of another person are and how we must respect them.

When we say 'I know how you feel' we can often be paying more attention to our own experience and feelings than those of the person we are visiting.

1

How you might express your understanding of another person's situation without saying 'I know how you feel'?

## What about prayer and spirituality?

'Should we always pray in a pastoral situation? The answer has to be yes. However, that doesn't mean it has to be an open prayer that another person hears or participates in. We shouldn't carry out any ministry in God's name without soaking it in prayer before, during and after the encounter. Otherwise we are simply doing social work (good though that might be).' Merrington (2012) p.72

## What factors might influence how and when you pray out loud?

It is always good to ask whether someone would like to you to pray, and to be willing to accept a refusal. You need to be aware of your own preferences and what you are comfortable with. Usually short prayers are most appropriate. It is good practice to ask what people would like you to pray for, but you can also bear in mind the conversation you have had with them. You might like to have a collection of prayers that you like to use to take with you, or you may prefer to use extemporary prayer. Don't forget that some people may like to say a prayer out loud themselves, or may like to join in a familiar prayer such as the Lord's Prayer.

It is helpful to remember that as pastoral ministers we are not 'bringing' God into the situation. God is always ahead of us and is in every situation. At times we can help to make his presence more visible or to draw out its significance. But we must be careful not to think we know all the answers.

It is too easy, and very dangerous, for us to assume that as the person offering the ministry of the church we have all the answers, that we have the monopoly on understanding God and how he is at work in the world. Sometimes it will be the person we are visiting who helps us look anew and see new truths about God.

## Safeguarding considerations

Always keep in mind an awareness of safeguarding best practice. What is necessary for the person, and for you, to feel safe in this encounter? Think about where and how you sit or stand, and be sensitive as to how a well-meaning gesture might be misinterpreted.

### How to end a visit

How easy do you find it to manage time on a visit? What do you do if it is difficult to get away?

Some techniques to bear in mind:

01

Make it clear when you arrive how long you can stay. Is this a quick visit to check up on someone? Is this a visit when you can stay for a cup of tea and a chat? Is this a visit to discuss a particular issue. It might help to give a specific time limit, or to say that you need to leave by a certain time. It is better to establish this at the beginning than to rush away at the end. If there is something difficult that someone wants to say, they might put it off, and if you leave before expected they may not have the chance to say it at all.

02

When the visit does need to end, and it is clear there is more to say, then make an appointment to continue the conversation. This shows that you value the issue enough to make time for it.

03

Think about what markers you use to signal a visit is coming to an end. You could ask, 'Is there anything else you would like to say today?' Often offering to pray is a good way of pausing, gathering up all that has been said and thought, and marking an ending.

04

Remember that some issues will not be able to be worked through in one visit, and you need to establish a longer term pattern of visiting. Conversely, be aware of when the need for visits has come to an end. Some pastoral relationships will be ongoing, but some are for a season. Here too, you need to signal a clear ending (at the same time, showing that if support is needed again, it will be there).

## What next?

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### Reflection and record-keeping

You will need to decide what is the most helpful way for you to keep records of your visits, to help with reflection and supervision. For many, some form of journal is helpful to record what happened during a visit, and especially to process difficult visits. It is best to make notes about the visit as soon afterwards as possible, and to record the exact words used where possible. With an ongoing pastoral relationship these sorts of notes can help you reflect on how the situation is changing and developing over time.

### Confidentiality and safeguarding

In keeping notes and a journal, especially those which you are sharing with others, you need to be aware of confidentiality and data protection issues. Records should not contain details of individuals without their consent, and information should not be passed to a third party without their permission (unless someone's safety is at risk). You can keep personal notes in a coded form so that others can't identify it.

You need to be clear with people about what you can and can't keep confidential. In most ministry teams there is a system of 'collegial confidentiality' to enable support and supervision. Do not promise to keep something confidential if you can't honour that promise.

It can be easy to 'accidentally' break confidentiality outside the supervision context, especially with members of the community who are known by many people. Remember that even the fact that you have made a visit is confidential, and people may not want others to know. In

casual conversation it is not appropriate to mention a visit or anything that happened or was discussed.

Consider whether there are any safeguarding implications of the conversations you have had; the safeguarding training you will have done before you can be commissioned will be helpful on that subject. Remember safeguarding is everyone's business – if you become aware of a safeguarding situation you need to raise this with your Parish Safeguarding Officer or in their absence the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, whose details can be found on the Diocesan website.

In a safeguarding emergency the Police or relevant Social Services team for your area should be contacted.

### Follow up

It may be that you or another member of the ministry team need to follow up a visit. Be clear with the person what information you will pass on to anyone else, and what the next steps in the relationship will be.

Be aware that in your role you cannot solve every issue and you may need to refer on to specialist organisations. You need to obtain the person's permission to pass on any details, and it may be most appropriate to encourage them to make the contact themselves.

Don't forget that whatever happens there is no restriction that prevents you from offering the person you have visited in private prayer to God!

## Case study

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Using the information above, split into groups and take one of the following case studies to discuss your response:

- Your neighbour tells you that Becky down the road is struggling and she thinks she would really value a visit from someone from the church. As you are down the road and you know her from the street garden party that happens each June, could you visit on behalf of the church?
- You have been visiting Caleb for some months now to take him Home Communion. This time at the end of the visit Caleb asks you to do some shopping for him as he has a really bad leg, and has completely run out of milk. Caleb says he sees you as not just a church visitor but as a friend. If you could just pop down to the shops that would be great.

## Reflect on the course

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Think back through the course as a whole. On your own initially, though you may have time to discuss in pairs later, how would you answer the following questions:

1

What has been affirming?

2

What has been challenging?

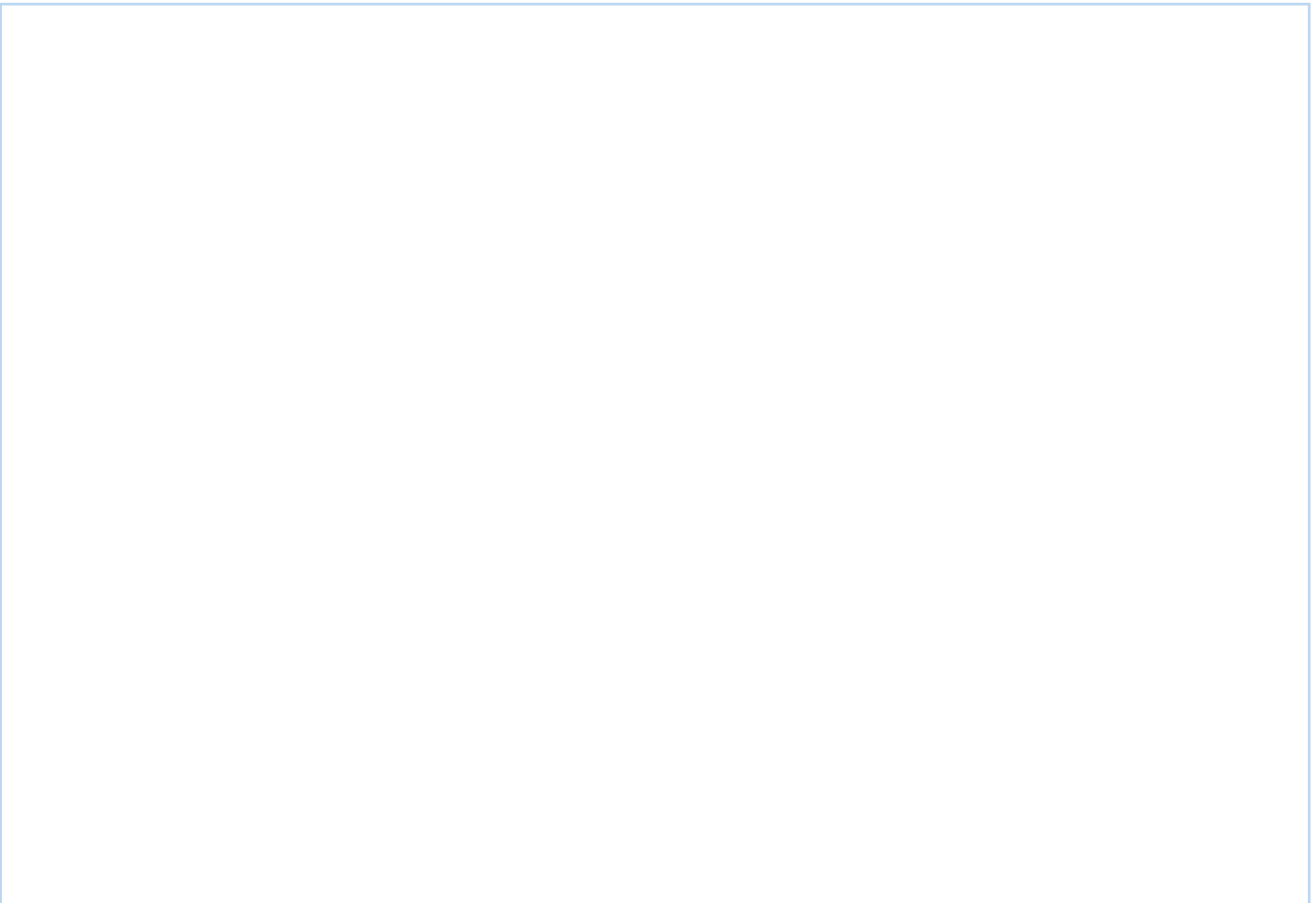
3

What were the most important things you learned?



4

Did anything surprise you? About the content? About yourself?



## Next steps

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Once you have had a chance to reflect on your calling to ministry, arrange to meet with your incumbent to discuss your next steps. If it is to be commissioned ministry as a Lay Pastoral Assistant, you will need to complete the Ministry Specification form together, so that you have agreed expectations for your ministry, and have clear arrangements in place for supervision and support.

You may already have a date for the Commissioning Service or if not it will be arranged soon. Your group may be commissioned all together or this may happen more locally. You will need a valid DBS check and to have completed all the necessary safeguarding training before you can be commissioned, and you will need to renew this training and check every three years in order to remain a commissioned minister.

You may find it helpful to meet with other pastoral ministers, as well as your incumbent, for mutual support, sharing difficult situations (with appropriate confidentiality) and developing skills.

The Pastoral Skills course is an introductory course designed to get you started. If you go on to be commissioned, we hope you will want to go deeper into some areas, depending on the kind of ministry you are going to exercise. Details of Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) opportunities are on the Diocesan website. These are provided free of charge for all those exercising a licensed or commissioned ministry in the name of the Diocese. Have a look at what's available. We would be glad to hear any suggestions for things you would like to see in the programme in future.

As you grow in confidence and understanding and become more aware of your own distinctive gifts you may even feel drawn to explore a further call to ministry, or ministry in a different context. Your incumbent or someone from the Diocesan Vocations team will be happy to help you reflect on this.

## Closing prayer

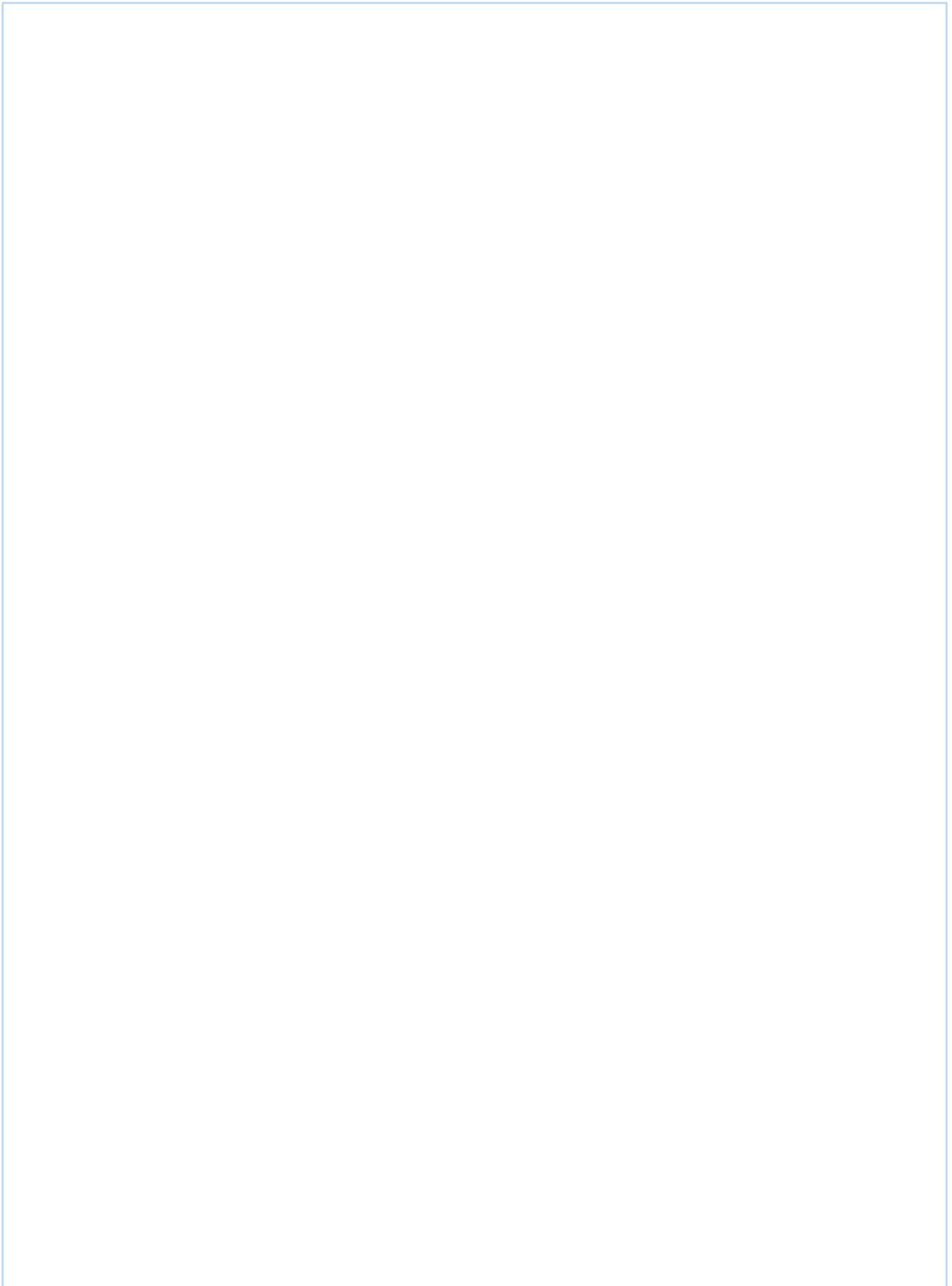
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God of power,  
may the boldness of your Spirit  
transform us,  
may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us,  
may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve  
and worship you  
now and always. Amen.

**Thank you, and farewell!**

## Additional notes

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We acknowledge with grateful thanks all who have contributed to the content and structure of this course booklet as it has evolved through use in parishes and deaneries across the diocese.



[www.salisbury.anglican.org](http://www.salisbury.anglican.org)

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The NRSV Bible, also known as New Revised Standard Version is used for Bible references throughout this booklet.