An Introductory Course for

PARISH VISITORS

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DIOCESE OF LICHFIELD
GOING FOR GROWTH

Introduction

The quality of the pastoral care that Christians offer to one another, and to all with whom they have contact is one of the things that identifies us as the people of God, sharing God's love in the world. Parishes and Christian communities are all responsible for this care, although certain people may have particular roles in organising and overseeing the systems of pastoral care.

Many church members may have particular gifts in this area, including a gift for care expressed in the simple act of "visiting". For some the thought of visiting as a Christian or church member will seem a daunting task and one that they may not feel comfortable doing. Some may even feel that they are doing the vicar's job. In reality, a community is unlikely to be transformed by the care-giving of one person; it is much likely to be transformed by the quality of care offered by all, and in a particular way by groups or teams who take responsibility for this important aspect of the church's life.

The aim of this course is to church members some insight and skills, and ideas about good practice, to get them started in visiting in the parish. Its purpose is to give both confidence in understanding and skill to make their visiting as sensitive and effective as possible. The course does not provide techniques but insights, which can frame attitudes and reactions as individuals share their stories with others. The course does not award a qualification, but is intended to encourage people to think about good and effective practice in pastoral care.

Sessions

Session One - Introduction to Pastoral care

Session Two - Listening

Session Three - Visiting those who are suffering

Session Four - Visiting the bereaved

Session Five - Praying with individuals

Session Six - Setting up a Visiting Team

Session One - Introduction to Pastoral Care

"What is a Christian visitor seeking to do?"

Aims of the session:

- **To outline a definition of Pastoral Care**
- **To reflect on the "Good Shepherd" model of John 10**
- **To apply this model in terms of "empowering"**

Exercise 1: Three Questions

In 2s or 3s discuss your answers to the three questions. Share some of your answers with the whole group.

1. What do you expect to get from this course?
2. What concerns or anxieties do you have about doing this course?
3. Why do you want to be involved in pastoral care?

What is pastoral care? – Looking for practical definitions

- Is it doing things for people?
- Is it deciding what they need and giving it to them?
- Is it serving people?
- Is it sympathising with people?

Exercise 2 – Pastoral Care is …

In 2s or 3s produce as complete a definition of pastoral care as possible.

As a whole group draw out any common strands in the definitions.

‘The Good Shepherd’

Read John 10 v.1-16:

10‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’6Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

11 ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (NRSV)

What roles of the "Good Shepherd" are described in this passage?

Consider whether or not this is an appropriate summary of the passage:
"The task of the Good Shepherd is to enable sheep to be sheep"

We could talk about pastoral care as the way in which we are "being Christ" to one another. This encourages us to think in a certain way about the purpose of pastoral care and the ways in which we might carry it out.

It could be put this way:

"The aim of Pastoral Care is to enable others to be empowered to be the people God made them to be".

What do you think "empowering" is?

- "I can make decisions for myself and by myself".
- "I can see more clearly the issues involved".
- "I don't feel so overwhelmed and not out of control".
- "I feel more confident".
- "I feel more as though I belong and have a place and role".
- "I can do more myself".
- "I can see that there are people to do things for me."

Can you think of any examples of times when you were empowered by someone else?

What was it about the way they treated you that meant you felt empowered?

Reflection Questions:

Which definition of pastoral care do you find most helpful?

Does it explain why you think it is important to be involved in pastoral care?

Session Two – Listening

What makes a good listener?

Aims of the session:

- **To think about the process of listening**
- **To reflect on some of the skills necessary to be a good listener**
- **To think about the difference listening can make**

Exercise 1 – What is listening?

(a)*"To be happy is to be listened to"*

In pairs consider the differences between a dialogue by letter/ chatting on the Internet/ a telephone call and a face-to-face conversation.

Share ideas with the whole group.

Although we take in all sorts of information aurally, and have all kinds of different conversations, many of us do not spend much time really listening to another person. We may give other people chance to speak, but that is not the same as really listening to them. The experience of being really listened to can be a profound experience.

(b) Can you think of a time when someone really listened to you?

What qualities did they have that you appreciated or noted?

What is it like when you want to be heard, but the person you are talking to is not really listening, or only half listening?

As a whole group, draw up a profile of the things you think make a "Good Listener".

The type of listening that characterises pastoral care, is sometimes called *attentive listening*, or *global listening*. This indicates the way in which we pay attention to all of the ways in which a person is listening: through what they say, how they say it, silences, and body language. In Pastoral Care, listening is **three** directional:

1. Listening to God

In pastoral care, you are never with another person just in your own strength, but in the strength of Christ, to share the compassion and love of God with them.

Listening to God means being open to the presence of Christ with you and the person you are caring for. It is about paying attention to what God might speak into that situation and remembering that God cares for us and the person we are with more than ever could.

What difference might it make knowing that you aren't the only one concerned for the person?

Listening is being aware of God's gifts of ministry through the Holy Spirit, particularly the gifts of discernment and wisdom. God's prompts us to see those things that are significant and those that are connected.

Can you think of times when you have had an insight that has gone to the heart of a problem or opened a window of understanding?

"Problems generally lie, not in what we can easily talk about, but in what we cannot".

How have you found this to be true?

2. Listening to Ourselves

Listening to ourselves involves knowing and accepting ourselves as we really are, with our vulnerabilities, limitations, prejudices, unresolved pain and anxieties. Having these is normal - they do not discount us from giving Christian service.
"We come as a wounded servant"

Be Aware of our needs *"Every carer NEEDS someone to care for"*

Be Clear as to our role *"We are not the Lone Ranger"*

Be Ready to Look for Support *"I can't, but I know someone who can"*

Why is this important, as you think about parish visiting?

Listening to ourselves is about being honest about our own experiences, and particularly the things which may still be raw for us. Whatever we have experienced, can we put this aside in order to focus on someone else's story, or can we only focus on our own experience buzzing around in our head? One of the things we have to do in pastoral care, is know how *not* to listen to ourselves, when we are telling our own story instead of focussing on the story of the person we are caring for.

3. Listening to the Other Person

Listening is much more than just hearing their words. Real listening to another person isn't passive, but an active – and quite tiring! – process which demands a high level of focus.

When we really listen to someone else:

- We affirm their dignity and personhood through giving them our time and attention
- We respect their individuality through being non-judgmental
- We value their secrets through keeping confidentiality(to be considered more later).
- We stimulate their thinking through letting them talk
- We empower their decision-making through reflection /encouragement/ clarification.
- We show that they are loved and cared for through our empathetic approach (putting ourselves in their shoes).
- *We listen to the whole person - mind, body and spirit.*

Listening skills can be learned and practised. Some people are naturally good listeners, and others need to develop the techniques. Everyone can improve the quality of their listening by practising attentive or active listening.

Exercise 2: Listening triads

In groups of three each person in turn takes on one of the following roles:

- listener
- listened to
- observer

In turn shares thoughts about "What has happened this week?" (5 minutes)

When you have each had your turn, reflect on:

- How did it feel to be listened to?
- How did you experience the task of listening?
- What did you observe in the process?

Reflection Question:

What is the key thing you have learnt about listening?

Session Three - Visiting those who suffer

Does a Christian visitor have anything to offer to a person who is ill or suffering?

How you we think about suffering?

What does it mean to suffer? Each of us will have experiences of suffering and will have seen or read about many other instances of suffering. Human history is full of accounts of suffering, some on enormous scales that are beyond our comprehension, and some which re more akin to the types of experiences we may have had.

Exercise 1 – Defining Suffering

In pairs, think about how you would describe the experience of suffering. You are not being asked to describe the *cause* of your suffering, but what it *felt* like to experience it.

As a whole group make a list of words or phrases that are common to the experience of suffering

Can we make any sense of Suffering?

Suffering is difficult to explain or rationalise, because it is clear that it happens, but it is not clear why people should suffer, especially given that we believe in a good and powerful God. For centuries Christians have tried to provide answers to why people suffer. Indeed, we know that in Jesus' time this debate was going on.

In John 9, Jesus disciples ask him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.' (v2-3) This exchange is the beginning of a passage in which Jesus heals the blind man, and the man gradually comes to understand who Jesus is. When the disciples ask the question, they seem to be assuming that suffering is a punishment, the result of a particular

sin. Jesus is clear that this is not so, and goes on to show how through this particular blind man, God's works are revealed.

We cannot make sense of suffering by assuming that it is deserved; that it is apportioned according to desert. We know from our own experiences that suffering seems to be far more random than that, indeed that can be one of the things that makes suffering so difficult, that there is no rhyme or reason to it.

Visiting those who are suffering, is not about explaining their suffering or rationalising it. We do not know the answers any more than they do. Rather, it is about journeying with them through the difficult times they are experiencing.

Job's Comforters

The Book of Job, tells the story of Job's suffering and how he copes with it. The people around Job, far from helping him, seem to compound his suffering. So much so, that we might be familiar with the phase "Job's Comforters".

Job's three friends were shocked when they see how greatly he was suffering, and initially sat with him for seven days and seven nights. However, as the story unfolds, they move from accompanying Job in his suffering, to trying to explain it. His friend Eliphaz suggests that Job must have sinned, and later argues that Job has undermined their religion. Bildad says Job should repent, and that God punishes the wicked and Zophar says that Job must deserve the punishment from God, and goes on to say that wickedness always receives just retribution. Job does not appreciate the help he has received!

> "Then Job answered: 'I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all.'" (16:1-2)

We may say that these are extreme examples of bad help, and that people today would not behave as Job's comforters did. Whilst they might not go to the same lengths to blame us for our own suffering, it is not uncommon to experience "help" which is not actually very helpful!

Exercise 2 – Unhelpful help!

What sort of "comfort" have you been offered from others that my have compounded, rather than eased your suffering?

What is the problem with the type of comfort that Job's friends offer?

What is it that we should avoid doing, when offering care to someone experiencing suffering?

What are the expectations of the suffering person being visited?

It is important to know what we can and can't offer as pastoral visitors. We may be able to offer support, but we cannot give answers. The other side of this is that those whom we visit might have particular expectations of what we will be able to do or be.

Exercise 3 - Expectations

What do you think those expectations might be?

How would you handle expectations that are impossible, unreasonable or inappropriate?

It is important to be aware of your own limitations as a pastoral visitor, not only in terms of what you can and can't do, but also in terms of what you should and shouldn't do.

Everyone considering visiting or offering pastoral care in the parish should ensure that they are familiar with the ***Diocese of Lichfield Guidelines for Pastoral Care*** (Appendix A). These will help you to think about appropriate and necessary boundaries in pastoral relationships.

Acknowledgement of limitations and boundaries, is of course balanced with being a compassionate and loving presence, and perhaps offering, or arranging some sorts of practical help. A useful way to think about this might be to ask what you would like from a pastoral visitor.

Exercise 4 – How to help

Consider in groups of three each of the following scenarios, asking the question:

How would I hope that a visitor might respond if ...?

"You live alone, you have just fallen down and broken your leg"

"You have just heard that a near relative has just died suddenly"

"The bread-winner in your family has just been made redundant"

"You are suffering from a long-term debilitating condition"

“You have just discovered that one of your children is taking drugs”

The aim of visiting those who are suffering, is to ease their journey and share their burden. As Christian carers, we aim to be an aid to "wholeness” by being a channel of grace, peace and harmony. Pastoral care is not about *curing* suffering, but walking alongside those who are suffering in order to empower, support and perhaps give practical help. To share the love, care and light of Christ with those who are experiencing darkness.

Reflection Question:

What do I have to offer to someone who is experiencing suffering?

Session Four - Bereavement and Loss

Visiting those who are grieving

We are a people of loss. Everybody experiences bereavement and grief at some point in their lives. This session may bring to the surface losses you have experienced in your own life. Try not to repress these feelings but let the content of the evening speak to them, reflect on your feelings and experiences of grief.

Loss and bereavement are a normal part of life. Most people move through the stage of intense grief, a new life although the memory of the loss is not lost. We do not "get over" those we have lost, but we adjust to life without them. Many people live with loss that is very painful for them. Some people are never able to adjust to life without their loved one, and the passage of time may not have eased their acute sense of loss and grief. For those who have adjusted, there will always be moments when their experience of loss surfaces, and they are taken back to the rawness of the grief that they experienced.

Many psychologists believe that grief is a process with different stages that must be worked through. There are no short cuts in grief, we have to process our loss and deal with the range of emotions that we experience. Grief is different for every person, but there are certain aspects of grief that are common to most people. Different commentators identify different numbers of stages, but the different models have a lot in common.

Exercise 1 – stages of grief

What do you think are common experiences of those who are grieving?

What factors affect each particular experience of grief?

The stages of Bereavement

This is not a linear process. A bereaved person does not work through each of these in turn, for the same amount of time. They may experience one stage for a long time, and not really experience another stage at all. They may experience them in a different order, or return to an earlier stage at some point in the process.

1. Shock
Initial reactions to death are often shock, even when the death may have been anticipated. The bereaved may experience numbness and disbelief; pangs of grief; uncontrollable weeping; physical pain and weakness; waves of panic, for example.

2. Yearning
This stage is characterised by a longing for the deceased which is so intense, it is often a physical feeling. It may include sleeplessness; restlessness; questioning: "Where are they?" and feeling of emptiness.

3. Acute Anxiety
Often those who have lost someone will treat those dear to them differently as part of their reaction to dealing with loss. They may become anxious about being separated from the remaining family, or worry that something bad is going to happen to them. Conversely they may find it difficult to care for them, because of the fear of losing them as well. Anxiety can lead to mood swings, and symptoms which might find physical expression, such as shingles, eczema, stomach aches etc.

4. Anger
Very often people feel angry about their loss, especially in the case of unexpected or untimely deaths. They may be angry towards the person who has died and feel that they have abandoned them; they may be angry with doctors and the hospital, and feel that they should have done more. They may be angry with God or the universe, for taking away the person they loved.

Very often anger also leads to feelings of guilt. People feel guilty that they are angry, and may also feel guilt about what they should have done for someone in life.

These feelings of guilt and anger may not be rational – it may not be the case that the doctors did anything wrong, or that they should have been kinder to someone whist they were alive, but it is still important to process those feelings.

5. Depression
It is common for people who experienced the loss, particularly of a child or partner, to wonder what is the point of carrying on. They may well feel that they would rather be with the deceased in heaven, than continuing to suffer in this life. Depression can manifest itself in a range of different symptoms including: apathy; despair; suicidal thoughts; self-comforting through use of alcohol, drugs, sex, food for example. If this phase lasts a long time (longer than a couple of months, and certainly longer than six months) the bereaved may need extra help from their GP.

6. Reminiscing

Very often people who are bereaved will remember the time around the death with great clarity, and will repeatedly tell the story of the events immediately before and after the death of the loved one. They may also talk about the funeral and the time immediately after the loss. This is part of processing the loss. The bereaved may also reminisce about happier times before the loss, and this can indicate the beginnings of healing.

7. Loneliness and Loss of Identity

For many people the loss of a partner, (but also of a parent of child, for example) means that their whole sense of identity is called into question. They are no longer part of a couple, and have to find a new way to think of themselves, as well as a new way of relating to others. People who socialised with their partner, may feel very excluded from their old friendship group and feel a stigma attached to being a widow or widower. They may notice that other people treat them differently, and they perhaps are not invited to social events they would have been previously included in. This can be very painful. Continuing to do the same things without the partner, can also be very painful and may bring the loss into sharp focus, just at the time you want to be able to talk to other people or engage in an activity you enjoy.

8. The New Self

Gradually, a bereaved person will emerge from the intense stages of grief and may feel able to enjoy things again. They may begin a journey of discovering new possibilities, interests and sense of identity. This does not, of course, mean that they have forgotten the deceased, but that they have integrated their past with that person, and the loss of them, into their new self.

A bereaved person may feel guilty about developing their new self, and that it is disloyal to the person they have lost, for example. It can take a long time to reach this point, and having done so, the bereaved person could still go back to other stages of grief, but gradually they will be able to send more and more time in their new self.

Visiting the bereaved

All bereavement is intensely personal, no two experiences are the same, and even people mourning the same person may respond very differently to that loss.

Exercise 2 – accompanying grief

What is the purpose of visiting someone who is bereaved?

What do's and don'ts do you need to be aware of?

Visiting the bereaved is important for many reasons. It matters that they know there are people who care about them and who are around to help if necessary. There are two very specific things that pastoral visitors can offer to those who are bereaved:

1. Normalising
Many people, as they experience the stages of grief do not know what is happening to them. It is common for people to worry that they are going mad, or that what they are experiencing is abnormal in some way. They may not want a full explanation of the stages of grief, to be able to reassure them that what they are experiencing is a common part of grief is important, and can be very reassuring for people.

2. Allowing them space to talk
Sometimes people who have experienced bereavement feel that they want to talk about their loss, to the point where their friends and family are finding it difficult to keep listening! As a visitor, you are able to give them the space to tell the story, over and over again if necessary, as part of their processing of their loss.

Stuck in a stage of grief
The stages of grief outline a process which people work through in their own way, until they come out the other end. Sometimes people get stuck in a particular stage of grief and are not able to move on with processing their loss.

Things *not* to say to the bereaved …
There are various things people say after a death, some of which are more helpful than others! If you are visiting to offer pastoral care to someone who has experienced loss, it is much more important that you are open to finding out what the bereaved person is experiencing, than that you offer them platitudes.

Exercise 3 – appropriate care

What have you found to be helpful support in times of loss?

What stories have you heard from people who have experienced bereavement about the care they were offered?

What do you think are inappropriate *things to say?*

It may be tempting to tell our own story of bereavement, or to make promises about when and how a person will feel better. Whilst these may be very well intentioned they are unlikely to help a person recently bereaved. The Role of the Visitor is to listen to how the bereaved person is feeling; to support them through whatever practical and emotional means are appropriate. It is also important that you are there to offer a Christian perspective on loss. This does not mean that there are answers as to *why* God has taken their loved one, or that they are not entitled to grieve, lament and express anger with God – that is a profound part of the Christian journey. But it does mean that underpinning everything is the Christian hope of resurrection. You may be able to hold on to that hope, when it has no meaning for the bereaved person, and gradually they may also hold on to it as one aspect of their understanding of what has happened.

Reflection Question:

How can we help to provide people with space to grieve?

Session Five - Praying with people

Facilitating Encounters with God

Offering Christian pastoral care, particularly on behalf of a parish or Christian community is an expression of God's care for every person. Part of the care we offer is to enable the person to encounter God in their situation and to experience God's grace in their life.

One of the roles of a pastoral carer is to be an encourager of faith. This does not, of course, mean cajoling, bullying or manipulating people into the rituals of faith or making false promises about what faith can do. It is about modelling a journey of faith and taking small steps with them, at a time when they might find it difficult.

Being part of the body of Christ, means that we can hold our faith even when one of us is going through a time of uncertainty. We can hold a brother or sister in faith, when they are not in a place to believe for themselves.

Exercise 1 – Encouragement in faith

What are the things that have encouraged you in your faith, particularly when times are hard?

In what ways might you hold someone else in their faith, when they are finding it difficult?

Praying with others

Prayer is one of the ways in which we connect with God, and come to know more of the ways in which God is at work in our lives. How each of us pray is a very personal thing, and may be a very sensitive area to share with someone else.

Unless we know a person well, it is difficult to know whether or not they will want us to pray with them or for them. Not everybody is comfortable with prayer, especially when they are facing difficult circumstances. It may be helpful to point out that prayer can be a time of questioning God, of expressing anger and sadness as well as a

time of asking or comfort and peace.

When you do pray with someone, it is important to use language that is accessible to them and appropriate to the particular context. It is no use *only* offering prayers of praise when a person is suffering and distressed. Any prayer you offer should maintain the dignity of the person and affirm their own spirituality.

Many people find the Psalms helpful. There are some beautiful psalms of praise, but there are many of desperation, anger, frustration and fear. These psalms might articulate the way we feel and our questions to God, in a way we would not be able to express ourselves.

Exercise 2 – Psalms of Lament

Consider these verses from Psalm 10:

1 Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
  Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
2 In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—
  let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

3 For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart,
  those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord.
4 In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, 'God will not seek it out';
  all their thoughts are, 'There is no God.' …

12 Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand;
  do not forget the oppressed.
13 Why do the wicked renounce God,
  and say in their hearts, 'You will not call us to account'?

14 But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief,
  that you may take it into your hands;
the helpless commit themselves to you;
  you have been the helper of the orphan.

15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;
  seek out their wickedness until you find none.
16 The Lord is king for ever and ever;
  the nations shall perish from his land.

17 O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;
  you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear
18 to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,
  so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

In what circumstances might this Psalm be helpful?

What does it give permission for, or articulate that we might not be comfortable expressing?

Prayer is not about *our* promises.

We cannot know what the outcome of prayer will be – because we believe that God hears our prayers and responds to them, does not mean that we know *how* God will respond to them. Healing and wholeness are about more than cures to physical suffering.

Praying for others

Part of your ministry is to pray for them in the coming days, and you may want to share with them that you will be doing that. When you visit people, they may or may not want you to pray with them. It is generally best to ask if they would like to pray together, even at the risk of them saying no. Not everyone is able to pray in the midst of distress, and even if they want to, they may have no words to express to God what they are experiencing.

What you ask them is important:

> "Shall we say a prayer together?"
>
> "Can I pray for you?"

It is important to consider the difference between asking someone to pray with you and offering to pray for them. It may be more empowering to pray *with* someone, but in times of crisis and difficulty it might be important to pray for them when they cannot pray for themselves.

There are many resources for praying with people in difficulty, particularly the ill and bereaved. You may want to start to collect prayers that you like and would be comfortable using as part of your care for others.

Exercise 3 – Prayer resources

What prayers, Bible passages etc can you think of which might be appropriate to use when visiting the sick, bereaved or distressed?

What things do you need to be aware of when selecting prayers for particular occasions or circumstances?

For some people and some circumstances, it will be most appropriate to pray without using resources. For some people this will come naturally, others may find this more difficult. Making prayers up is sometimes called *extemporary* prayer. There are a few guidelines that might help you to pray 'on the spot' as part of your pastoral care:

- Keep it personal and appropriate to the situation
- Keep it honest, do not try and minimise or dramatise the situation that is being faced
- Keep it simple
- Keep it relaxed and informal, use language that is appropriate to you and the person you are praying with
- Keep it quiet. Often a prayer in difficult circumstances needs to be gentle and intimate
- Don't panic if you don't know what to say, that can be part of your prayer. Sometimes it is enough to say to God that we are bewildered, or stunned and just to ask for God's presence with us.
- Don't feel that the prayer has to "fix" the situation – it won't! But it may help you to focus on God's presence in the midst of it.

Praying with people may give them an emotional release and a sense of the peace of God. Some people may have a physical reaction to this, it is not uncommon for people to cry when they are being prayed for.

Supporting people in prayer

Praying with a person during the visit is only part of your commitment to them. As well as continuing to pray for them, and where appropriate, asking others to pray for them, you may also want to do what you can to support the person in their prayer life.

There are a several small ways in which you can do this:

- Leave a prayer card when you leave
- Take copies of the prayers you have used with them and leave them
- Give assurance of your continued prayer for them.

Exercise 4 – Holding people in prayer

What else could you do to support someone through prayer, and in their own prayers?

Reflection Question:

How will your own prayer life change as a result of offering pastoral care?

Session Six - Setting Up a Team

Organising pastoral care in this parish

This session is about setting organising structures of pastoral care for your parish or benefice. The most common way to do this is by establishing a pastoral care team. Whatever framework you are putting in place, the good practice material in this session will be useful.

Working out a structure

There is no Christian community where pastoral care does not already happen. If you are thinking of formalising your systems of pastoral care, it may be because you want to do what you are doing more effectively, or because you have identified some gaps in the current provision of care.

Common issues that parishes face in their informal pastoral care structures are communicating information in appropriate ways and to the appropriate people, and relying on the clergyperson to visit.

Exercise 1 – Putting in a framework

What are the main gaps in providing pastoral care in your parish?

What sort of structure would ensure that those gaps are filled?

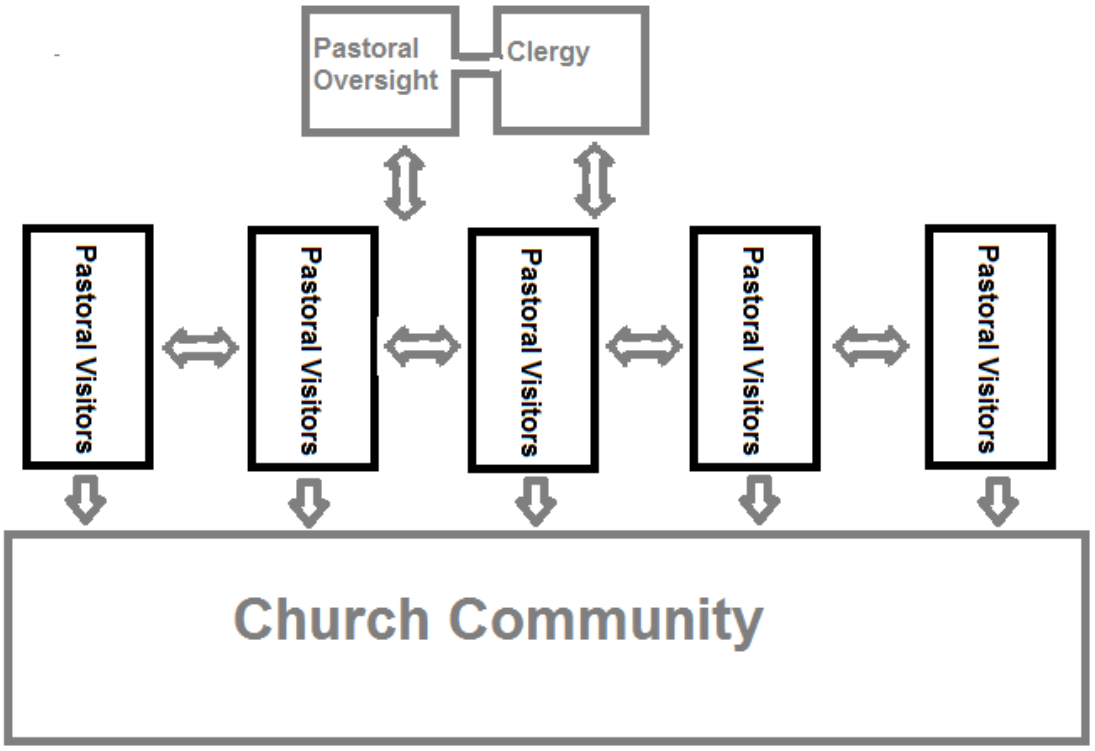
The shape of your team or structure should be the one that works best for your context. This will depend on the needs of your parish and the resources that you have available – particularly the people willing to be part of the team and their gifts in pastoral care.

Some examples of pastoral care structures

These are some examples of different types of systems for pastoral care. These are by no means the only options, and even if one feels suitable for your parish, you may need to adapt it to meet your exact needs.

1. Regular Patterns of Visits

On this model every member of the parish, and person connected with the parish is allocated a pastoral visitor.

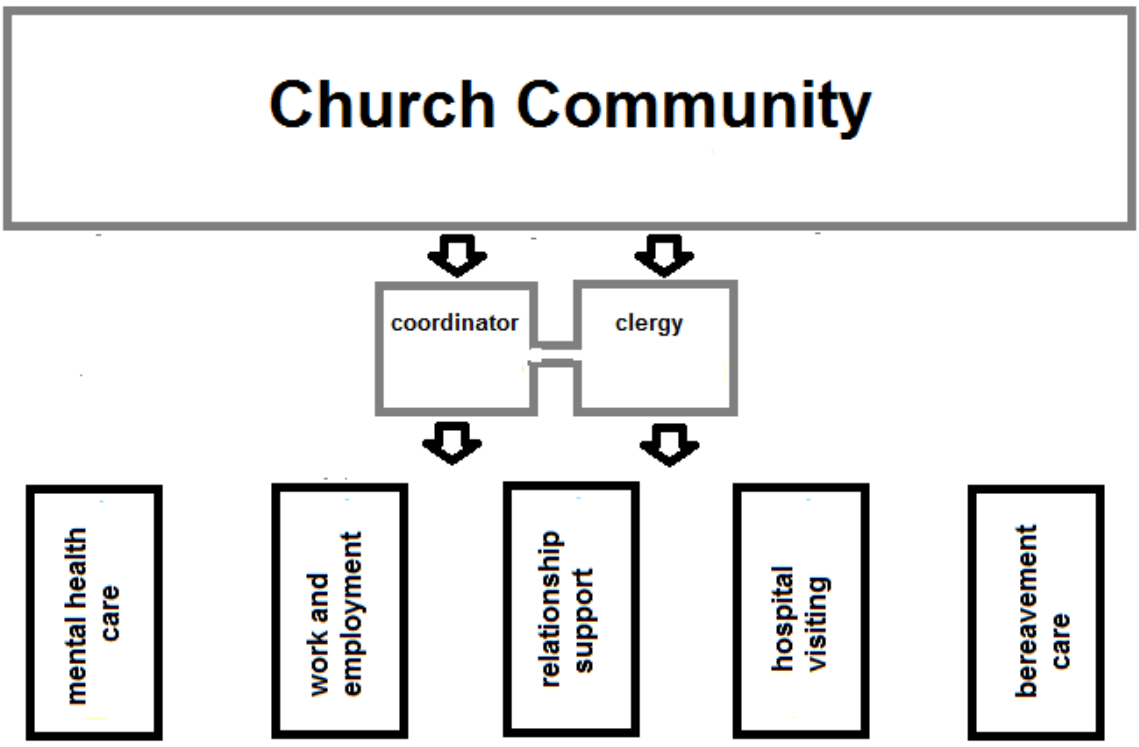


The Pastoral Visitors are coordinated by someone whose role is oversight of the whole system. This could be the clergy person, or someone appointed to the role, such as an authorised Pastoral Care Minister. The Visitors agree how often they will contact the members they have been allocated – they might try and visit them once or twice a year for example, or more often if there are particular needs.

This model focuses on building relationships, rather than just crisis pastoral care. IN the situation of a crisis, the regular visitor as well as the overseer and clergy might be involved in the care of the individual.

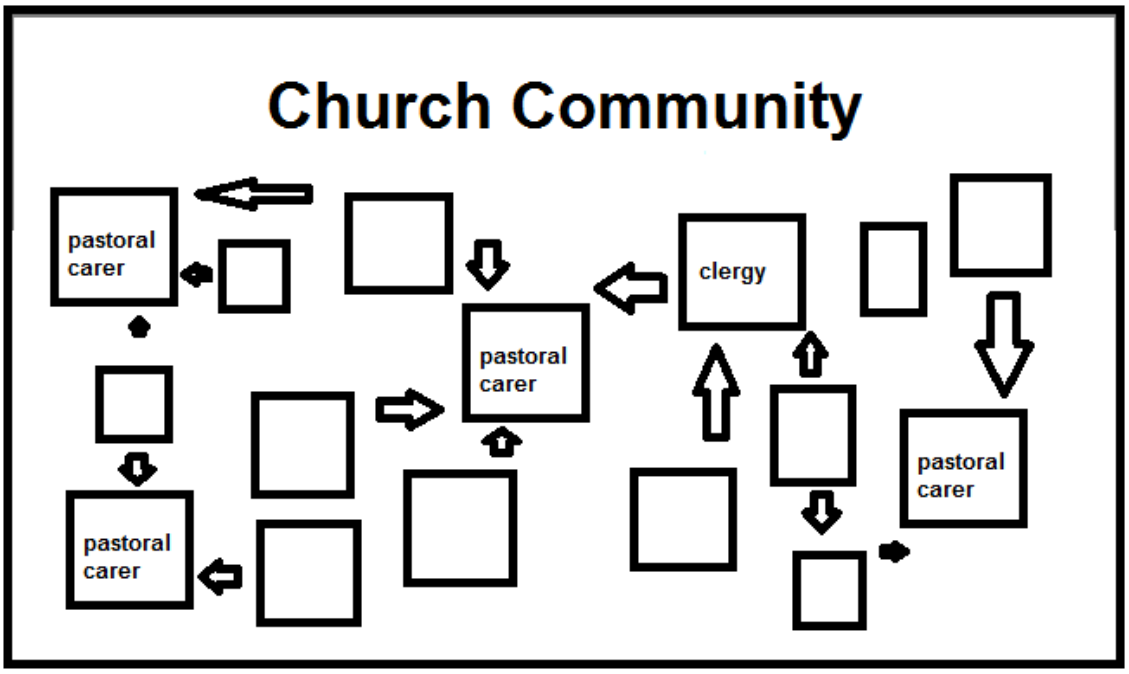
2. Specialisms Care

This model is based on different Pastoral Carers having different areas of care, or specialisms of care. Again, care is coordinated by an overseer who communicates needs to the pastoral carers.



3. Semi-formal networks

Pastoral carers are visible points of contact within the congregation and community. When someone is aware of a need they are encouraged to inform the clergy or one of the pastoral carers. The carer then responds to this information.



Exercise 1 – Reflecting on Structures

What do you think of these examples of structures of pastoral care?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each model?

Which one is closest to the sort of system that might work best in your parish?

Keeping Confidences

Confidentiality is an extremely important factor in pastoral care. If people feel that you will walk away from them and tell everyone else what you have heard, they are likely to be reluctant to talk to you. Trust between a pastoral visitor, and the person visited matters; without trust it will be very difficult to establish a good relationship. The sharing of personal information is a precious gift and should not be taken lightly. Therefore the information should not be passed on or used without permission, this disempowers the person and is an abuse of the position of visitor. There may be some circumstances in which you need to pass on information that you have heard

(see Guidelines, Appendix A). In such circumstances, you should seek permission before disclosing information, or ask the person to disclose it themselves.

For some it is a struggle to keep confidences; they find that they want to share the stories they have heard, especially those that make them see someone in a new light. However good your motivation, this is not ok! Keeping confidence is part of the discipline of offering pastoral care and is something you may have to work on. If you want to share information because the burden of it is too much to carry alone, you should share it anonymously with a supervisor or supervision group.

Keeping Records and Passing on Information

Communication is important in the effective pastoral care of a congregation or community. It is useful to develop appropriate networks of communication from the beginning. Some of the communication may be verbal and some may be written. If you keep any written notes or records you should remember that every one has a legal right to see any data that i kept on them. If information is stored technologically then you should have a Data Protection License. Basic information which is already in the public domain can be kept, such as names and addresses.

It is not a good idea to keep full notes on pastoral encounters. You may need to keep brief notes on ongoing situations, if so they should be identifiable only to you – so that if someone discovered them they wouldn't know to whom they referred. When you are no longer involves in that situation, the notes should be securely destroyed.

You may feel that you need a way of writing about what you have experienced and how you felt about the pastoral encounter. Journaling is a very good way of processing your reflections, and allows you to look back on a the journey you have made in a situation of pastoral care. Again, the references to a person in your journal should be coded so that if someone else found it, they could not identify the person.

Responsibility, accountability and support

Although you are visiting as a fellow human being, you are also there from the Church community and are therefore a representative of Christ. What you do or say reflects on the Church as the Body of Christ. You are therefore responsible to show Christian attitudes on behalf of your fellow members in the Body of Christ.

You may hear things which are difficult to process and feel that a burden has been passed on to you. It is essential that every pastoral care visitor has a person they can talk to in confidence if necessary. Part of setting up a team, is establishing patterns and frameworks of support for those doing the visiting. Support should come from several places:

- From the whole Church - through the prayers and affirmation of church members both formally and informally.

- From Other members of the Pastoral Visitors Team. The whole team should meet at regular intervals to share experiences (without divulging personal information); discuss problems and continue to learn together. This will also provide opportunities to reflect on how well the structure of the team is working.

- From your pastoral leader – incumbent or other – who can provide oversight, personal support and practical wisdom

- From External Sources, such as professionals in the caring services; diocesan staff and supervisors.

Exercise 2 – Supporting one another

How are you going to support one another in your pastoral care?

What formal arrangements will you put in place for supervision and accountability?

How will you ensure that the support respects and maintains confidentiality?

The Spiritual Dimension of the task

Much of what we have looked at has been on a very human level but we have also recognised that what we do has a spiritual dimension, it is important that we recognise that God is involved with the person and their life, long before we arrive on the scene. We are therefore sharing in what is already happening by putting a human face on the activity of God. God's interest, concern and love for the person is infinitely greater than ours can ever be and God is ultimately responsible for this person's welfare and wellbeing. Part of the care that we offer is for a person's

spiritual state as well as emotional, mental, physical etc. In order to do that, we need to invest in our own spiritual lives of faith and be prepared to share that journey with others.

Setting Up the Team

The biggest task is to set up the team and get all of the appropriate structures in place. It may well be that some structures are already there and you are adding to them, or you might want a change from structures that have not been very effective recently. As you begin to put the team in place it might help to focus on the following questions:

1. How will the Team work? ~ as a whole? - in separate parishes?
2. How will visiting be co-ordinated?
3. What records will be kept and who will have access?
4. Who will you call upon if you have difficulties?
5. How will the Team relate to the Church communities?
6. How will you affirm "informal" visiting already being carried out?
7. How will Team support and further training be provided?
8. What resources do you need?
9. Who will be your Team Consultant?
10. What has been forgotten?

Resources:

There are lots of books about the theory and practice of pastoral care and about the supervision of those who have a formal role in caring for others.

Paul Ballard & Stephen R Holmes (2005) *The Bible in Pastoral Practice* London: DLT

Alastair V. Campbell (1985) *Paid to Care? The limits of Professionalism in Pastoral Care* London: SPCK

Alastair V. Campbell (1986) *Rediscovering Pastoral Care*¸ London: DLT

David Deeks (1987) *Pastoral Theology – An Inquiry* London: Epworth

Robert Dykstra (2005) *Images of Pastoral Care* Chalice Press

J. Foskett & D. Lyall (1994) *Helping the Helpers – supervision and pastoral care* SPCK

Richard Gula (1996) *Ethics of Pastoral Ministry* New Jersey: Paulist Press

Elaine Graham (1995) *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood, Theology*. London: Mowbray.

Elaine Graham (2009) *Words Made Flesh: Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology* London: SCM

Emmanuel Lartey (1997) *In Living Colour: An InterCultural Approach to Pastoral Care & Counselling*, London: Cassell

D. Lyall (2001*) Integrity of Pastoral Care* London: SPCK

Jane Leach &Michael Paterson (2010) *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* London: SCM

Kate Litchfield (2006) *Tend My Flock: Sustaining Good Pastoral Care* Norwich: Canterbury Press

Henri Nouwen (1994) *The Wounded Healer*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

J. Woodward & S. Pattison (1999) *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral & Practical Theology* London: Blackwell

S. Pattison (2000) *A Critique of Pastoral Care* SCM

Frances Ward (2005) Lifelong *Learning* London SCM

Appendix A

Guidelines for Pastoral Care

Prepared by Rev Dr Jeff Leonardi
Bishop's Adviser on Pastoral Care and Counselling

Why have Pastoral Guidelines?

Pastoral care is inherently risky - so guidelines are essential. Clearly, the risks are more than outweighed by the immense benefits of pastoral care offered by the clergy and other pastoral ministers. But we need to follow the example of other 'caring professions' in evolving codes of good practice and accountability.

Christian pastoral care is distinctive in linking faith with caring, and in doing so in a variety of formal and informal settings and relationships. It is the very range and fluidity of these which can create uncertain boundaries, false assumptions and associated risks.

This guide aims to remind us of good practice and to help us deal with potentially risky situations. It is in two sections - the first deals with the pastoral relationship between the helper and the person seeking help: for those who would like to consider these issue in more depth—Sustaining Good Pastoral Care by The Norwich Diocese Pastoral Adviser Kate Litchfield (Canterbury Press, 2006) is recommended.

1. The Pastoral Relationship

Any helper or minister offering pastoral care to another person should be aware of the following basic guidelines.

Choosing the time and place
The practical reality of pastoral care is that we often meet another person alone, with no-one else nearby. However, this should be avoided wherever possible, certainly late at night. It is good for both parties to know that there is someone else at a discreet but contactable distance. Where a solitary meeting is unavoidable, it is good practice to at least let someone else know, perhaps in confidence, where you are going or how you can be contacted, or that someone is coming to see you. This is also a good safety precaution.

Agreeing 'contracts'
The idea of a contract may seem alien to Christian pastoral ministry - but it doesn't mean a legally binding document. Rather, it means having a clear understanding of the 'boundaries' of the relationship. It is important to recognise that, in a pastoral

relationship, there may be spoken and unspoken assumptions and expectations on both sides as to the extent and kind of commitment on offer. Is our commitment unlimited, at any time and overtime? If not, this should be declared from the outset.

Sometimes, a pastoral relationship does not start off in an ordered or carefully planned fashion. In a pastoral emergency we may simply be responding to an urgent need or cry for help in the parish. But at some time the need to establish boundaries may be important. Doing this skilfully and caringly is part of our responsibility as a pastoral minister.

Recognising Vulnerability
Vulnerability is frequently an aspect of pastoral care:

· the recipient of care is vulnerable through distress, situation and need;
· the minister is vulnerable through concern, the wish to be helpful, to the situation and the awareness of their own human and professional limitations and professional limitations.

The minister is responsible for maintaining an honest awareness of the vulnerabilities on both sides and a resolute determination to work with them and never to abuse them for his or her own needs.

Taking responsibility
People who are emotionally distressed may well want someone to take a decision for them - especially if the helper has the authority and status of a Christian Minister. But we must resist the temptation to do this, out of respect for both parties:

· Having respect for the person being helped means that we must try never to take decisions for them, but must help them to take responsibility for their own choices. The only exception to this is in extreme circumstances in which other authorities (e.g. medical, psychiatric, police) are also probably involved.

· Having respect for ourselves as carers means that we should not take on the responsibility of making decisions for other people. Such behaviour is also likely to create unhealthy dependency and it may be very difficult to give the responsibility for self back to the other person afterwards.

Respecting confidentiality
Confidentiality is normally assumed in Christian ministry – but there are two areas where different guidelines may apply:
· confidentiality and the confessional:
· Confidentiality and counselling practices.

Canon law upholds the absolute **confidentiality of the confessional**. However, there are legal requirements to disclose the appropriate authorities information about certain situations - for example, child abuse (*see Protecting children* below), or where another person's safety is threatened. The minister may thus have to

occasionally decide whether such disclosure is required.

The House of Bishops has asked for clarification of the legal position of ecclesiastical confidentiality and has received a paper by the Legal Advisory Commission. There may be a conflict between the modern law of evidence and the long established ecclesiastical tradition of absolute confidentiality.
A priest may have to say - 'I am bound in secular law to make a disclosure of certain matters…') Equally, a priest can (and under certain circumstances, should) make a condition of priestly absolution that the other person discloses the problem themselves or permits the priest to do so. The priest may have to make an 'Act of discernment' in the very particular circumstances of each case.

In the counselling profession, confidentiality is taken to include discussion with the counsellor's supervisor (see below), as long as anonymity is maintained. In Christian pastoral ministry, it may likewise be appropriate **EITHER** to tell the recipient of care that confidentiality may include your sharing with a pastoral supervisor, prayer partner or group, **OR** asking their permission to do so. Again, it is essential that no names are mentioned and that such discussion should always be in the interests of the highest standards of care for the person concerned.

Protecting children
We are all increasingly aware of the need for taking special care in ministry with children—for example, by vetting all volunteers who work with children and by seeking to ensure that no one works with a child or children alone, without safeguards. Similarly, we have responsibilities under The Children Act to report immediately any account of abuse involving children to the appropriate authorities - i.e. police or social services and if the Church is involved, the archdeacon or bishop. The NSPCC operates a 24-Hour helpline (see Resources). Revd Charmian Beech is the Lichfield Diocese Child Protection Officer - contact details can be found under the heading of 'Resources' in this booklet.

Being cautious about physical contact
There are obvious and real risks associated with touching another person in the context of pastoral care; In the present climate, restraint is often the right policy. The 'problem' is that we are physical beings and we can richly communicate care and support by touch. But we must remember that:

· Everyone has their own boundaries and limits in this regard and we need to be sensitive to the feelings of those who may not wish to be touched.

· Touch may be interpreted sexually even when it is not intended as such. Touch may also evoke in us unanticipated sexual feelings.

We need to find the right kind of support and nourishment in our personal relationships so that we do not risk bringing inappropriate needs of our own to the helping relationship. We are responsible for setting our own boundaries but should

also exercise caution, especially if we find ourselves alone with another person.

2. Helping the Helper

If we want to support and help others pastorally, we must learn to be aware of our own needs, of certain boundaries and our own support structures. We must also recognise the reasonable limits of time and energy we can give to pastoral work and the limits of our own competence.

Personal needs
Most of the risks associated with pastoral ministry arise from good intentions and the desire to care unstintingly. These risks would be reduced if we paid proper care and attention to our human and creaturely needs for rest and relaxation, prayer time and retreats, nourishing personal relationships, support and supervision. All these are the personal responsibility of the pastor, although the specialist diocesan staff and senior staff can help ministers access or organise some of these.

Support
Finding support in pastoral ministry usually means having one or more colleagues or friends with whom one meets for fellowship and to share the burdens and joys of service.

Supervision
'Supervision' means help from another person in thinking through both the routine and more difficult aspects of pastoral work. In the caring professions, supervision is considered a necessity, not an optional extra.

A minister's supervisor should have appropriate skills and should be outside the immediate parish situation. It is important to be able to talk freely to a supervisor, especially about the more demanding aspects, personal and professional, of the work. There are cost implications if a supervisor is to be paid, however it is possible to organise peer supervision (given the right aptitudes in each person) and group supervision, which can be organised with help from the Advisor for Pastoral Care and Counselling. (See Resources)

Accountability and authority
Appropriate support and supervision resources can also act as systems for accountability and advice, should difficulties arise in pastoral relationships. Where there is no support or supervision or where difficulties arise despite them, ministers must always be aware of the need to alert the appropriate Church authorities to the situation and to ask for advice. Many difficulties can be readily resolved when addressed early enough. The appropriate adviser may be the incumbent, team leader, rural dean, archdeacon or bishop.

Making Referrals
Every pastor has limits of experience and skill. Our confidence in prayer and the

Holy Spirit should not lead us to ignore sensible caution about single handed ministry or the need for a variety of appropriate resources, both sacred and secular.

Christian pastoral ministry can involve some needs which may be beyond the capabilities of the pastor concerned. When this occurs, the pastor can act as a point of contact or referral to other specialist agencies. It is helpful to make a list of local resources and services for referral. Some referral resources are listed at the end of this booklet.

Relationships within teams
The emphasis throughout this booklet has been on pastoral relationships - but it is also important to be alert to the rewards and risks of close working relationships:

- Immediate colleagues may be a source of help and encouragement in pastoral ministry, but sometimes tensions arise which lead to strain where there should be support. The senior staff and other consultants are always available to help teams work well together.

- Good support within teams can sometimes lead to growing personal relatedness and vigilance is also needed here about appropriate boundaries and the distinction between professional and personal relationships.

And finally ….
You may feel that there are an awful lot of cautions in this booklet about risks and dangers, making the whole area of pastoral care seem more fraught with difficulties than blessed by God. This is not the case, nor is it intended to be the message of this booklet.

We would, however, be neglecting our responsibilities if we did not address these issues with the seriousness they deserve. Once we are aware of the potential risks and dangers, we can proceed to care for our neighbours as ourselves with greater confidence and competence under God.

There are implications here for further training and both the Director of Ministry Development and the Advisor for Pastoral Care and Counselling can help you locate appropriate training resources both within and outside the diocese.

Resources

Bishops Adviser for Pastoral Care and Well Being
The Revd Preb Jane Tillier (07530 734079), jane.tillier@lichfield.anglican.org

Director of Ministry Development:
Revd Lesley Bentley, St Mary's House, The Close, Lichfield, Staffs, WS13 7LD (01543 306227/8) lesley.bentley@lichfield.anglican.org

Diocesan Advisor for the Safeguarding of Children
Mrs Kim Hodgkins, St Mary's House, The Close, Lichfield, Staffs, WS13 7LD (01543 306099) kim.hodgkins@lichfield.anglican.org

Association of Christian Counsellors
www.acc-uk.org 0845 1249569 / 9570

British Association for Counselling:
Produces Codes of Ethics for Counselling and exercise of counselling skills—1 Regent Place, Rugby, CV21 2PJ (01788 550899)

Relate - See Yellow Pages

Voluntary listening service
Christian Counselling Services 07980 387847

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