



How to ...

Offer effective pastoral care during the COVID-19 pandemic

'Coming Through Lockdown Together'

It is clear that as we encounter each wave of COVID-19 the effects of the pandemic and increased loneliness resulting from lockdown, self-isolation and shielding, will clearly leave individuals and communities with considerable negative mental health issues.

It would seem the Church is well placed to provide appropriate pastoral care and support in our local communities through this pandemic and into the future. In the words of one mental health practitioner: *'Because of its work in caring for families who have faced bereavement, the church is far better equipped to do this work than perhaps it believes it is'*.

In this guide, the Fromside Benefice, in the Yate and Fromside Mission Area, share their response and experiences:

"The thing we did was to bring together, for a process of consultation, representatives of the caring professions in our community; Health Care Professionals, Psycho Therapists, Counsellors, Ministers of Religion, Social Workers, Educationalists and Care Workers.

This enabled us to identify eight key areas of contextual focus for our pastoral strategy as a Benefice:

- Pastorally meeting the well-being of those isolated
- Signposting those who are really struggling to where they can get appropriate care and help
- Support for frontline workers
- Helping the bereaved
- Supporting Schools in working with staff, parents and children
- Offering spiritual resources for both the Church and the wider community
- Exploring the place of story in helping the healing process
- Communicating effectively with the local community the support we were offering."

"In meeting the needs of these eight focus areas, we have undertaken to take the following actions:

- We trained up and established a team of 'Core Listeners', using the professional and established skills of members of the worshipping community. This group offers immediate and effective listening support and care to anyone who contacted us for help.
- We produced an information card entitled 'Coming Through Lockdown Together', which was posted through every door in our community reaching over 13,000 people. The card detailed all the support and care we offered as a Benefice and also signposted people to other organisations which offered focused support and provision.

- We produced a leaflet for our worshipping community entitled 'Lets Chat', which gave all church members guidance on how to listen to people's needs and encourage them to effectively signpost people in need to the places where they could receive appropriate support and care.
- We provided all our Ministers and Listening Team members with a complete directory of organisations they could refer people to.
- We provided targeted support to our schools (3 church schools and 2 local authority) through the work of our Pastoral Family Liaison Minister, in offering one to one support for children and staff. Our Listening Team was also available to support staff and parents referred to us by the school. We provided Cream Teas for staff to show our appreciation of their work at this difficult time, weekly online assemblies and creative prayer activities for classes to use. We also developed and provided support pamphlets for staff and parents focusing on dealing with 'Trauma' and advice on how to cope with the loss of a loved one.
- We contacted local Care Homes and Doctors Surgeries, providing a contact card for staff and pamphlets to aid; staff well-being, Trauma and again coping with loss.
- We provided a weekly online connection with our Sunday service in Church, podcasts with both spiritual and theological content, introduction of a 'Mindfulness Service in church and online Quiet Days.
- We established garden visits by our Pastoral Team in the summer months, a walking buddies scheme, online social and study groups, and established creative interests groups to bring people together, thus enabling the sharing of story in a natural way.
- We established a Benefice Communications Group to oversee our website, social media contacts, links with the media and all forms of communication within the community during this crisis.

If you would like a copy of our full report 'Coming Through Lockdown Together' or examples of the resources we are using in our work, please do contact us on office@fromsidechurches.org.uk and we will be happy to provide them for you.

The response we have had to our work in the community has been really positive and is clearly greatly appreciated. The need for this work and its impact can be best summed up in this email we received from someone struggling with the impacts of anxiety and for whom we set up pastoral support:

"I really can't tell you what a profound sense of peace it brought to me to find there was help available and so readily. So many services are so very stretched at this time and you in our church were able to offer actual personal support with an actual person (not just assessment or questionnaire) in less than an hour. After an initial chat with the person offering listening support, I can sense already how incredibly helpful this pastoral care is going to be, not just to me but to my whole family. This is what true care for the family looks like. When you care for the parents you care for the children too."

Written by: Fr Malcolm Strange
Rector of The Fromside Benefice

Further How to... guides relating to the COVID-19 pandemic are available online at www.bristol.anglican.org/how-to