



RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THOSE MINISTERING TO THE BEREAVED

This document offers some links to sources of guidance and support as well as some case studies of how parishes are supporting those who are bereaved

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Introduction

‘A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another’. John 13: 34-35

Caritas Plymouth works with parishes and other partners to expand befriending and volunteer support to people who are sick, lonely, and ageing. We seek to share good practice from across the Diocese to empower people to develop new ways to support each other.

This short guide sets out some useful sources of advice for those supporting the bereaved. It aims to bring together a variety of material in one place which might be of value, particularly during the current Coronavirus.

Bereavement Support – Sharing learning from our parishes

Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and can be overwhelmingly painful, as well as different for each person. Understanding the process of bereavement or coming together with others will not prevent this pain, or reduce its intensity, but it can help to chart a path back to some kind of normal life.

A number of parishes already host bereavement groups and this section aims to share ideas for parishes looking to develop their own support networks. In the context of Covid-19, there may be many people who are unexpectedly bereaved or who are unable to say goodbye to their loved one or celebrate a funeral mass. Parish bereavement groups may be a good way for a parish to provide ongoing support to the bereaved either working through SVP or a parish group or inviting parishioners to develop a new group. The idea is not to create work for Parish priests but to encourage parishioners to take on this responsibility for providing mutual support.

Parish bereavement groups are ‘peer support.’ Peer support is when people use their own experiences to help each other. There are different types of peer support, but parish groups can:

- bring together people with shared experiences to support each other
- provide a space where people feel understood
- treat everyone's experiences as being equally important
- involve both giving and receiving support.

Bereavement groups don't work for everyone. For some people it can be overwhelming to hear people are still struggling with grief and loss for some time after the bereavement; people might share bad or incorrect advice; individuals can dominate or derail a group or people might be judgemental about different reactions to grief and loss. For some people, one to one support might be the right option and the Exmouth model might be a good option for setting up that kind of support. None of models below are perfect and what works in one parish may not work in another. But talking to others can help. None of the options offer formal counselling.

If a parish does go ahead with setting up a group, Annex A has some reflections for the group to consider

Bereavement Support Case Studies

Falmouth SVP Living with Loss Support Group

Falmouth Living with Loss Group has been running for over two years. The group meets once every other month and is facilitated by a volunteer who also has a counselling background. The group is advertised through the newsletter and anyone is free to contact the coordinator to get involved. The group is informal and open to anyone living with loss. It sends out an invitation to meet for a cuppa and a chat to anyone bereaved recently or at any time, and offers a place for mutual support and friendship

New Horizons Bereavement Group, Church of the Assumption of Our Lady of Torquay

The New Horizons Group has been running for over a year. A small group of parishioners agreed with the Priest that they would like to try out a group. It was clear from the start that this was not a counselling group but a social support group. The first group meetings were held in an external environment in a pub which has lots of space and offered privacy for conversations. It was a deliberate decision to meet in a neutral venue. Meeting in a public space was more informal and easier. After a while the group decided to meet for a meal instead and the group facilitator found a venue that was affordable for everyone. Decisions about how the group operates and what it does is very collaborative and everyone has a say.

The group meets once a month and there are around 14 regular participants with ages ranging from 20-80+. The Parish priest attends the meal as well. The group uses an App to keep in touch and this has been invaluable during the Coronavirus lockdown as people have been able to keep in touch.

The group is relatively informal and a social space. People are asked if they want to share their contact details and any important anniversary dates. If someone is struggling with their grief, the group organiser will ring them up to see if they want to talk about anything or need further support. Having the parish priest attend also means that if someone needs one to one support, that is on hand.

Parish of the Holy Family - Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton – We Care in Your Bereavement

The parish has developed a bereavement care team, offering care, support and friendship. They offer a phone call or visit, social events and coffee mornings. They promise 'good listening skills, respect for confidentiality and sensitive commitment'. The team has gone through a few changes since the adoption of GDPR.

The team work as follows:

- Fr Philip invited seven parishioners to be a 'support team' for the bereaved.
- These have backgrounds in nursing, teaching and personal ministry, some also have gone through personal bereavement.
- All hold up-to-date DBS clearance – half of the Team are Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- They are in no way a counselling service.

- A poster and photograph of the Team is displayed in the church and a card 'We care In your bereavement' is placed on the pews when there is a funeral.
- This card [and the poster] invites anyone who wishes to contact the parish office if they would like the support of a Team member.
- Fr Philip then discusses with individuals on the Team and they 'pair-up' someone with the bereaved. The two may then choose to have conversations on the telephone or meet somewhere mutually acceptable.
- The Team organise a number of coffee mornings after mass throughout the year.
- There is a thrice-yearly meeting of the Team, the Priest and the Parish Office Manager, for 'nuts and bolts' and forward planning.

Guidance on some practical issues surrounding bereavement

Funeral Cost and Affordability

Funerals are very expensive and during the Coronavirus, people may suffer unexpected bereavements. People should talk to their Priest if they have concerns about costs and planning. The local Priest or Deacon can help people think through planning a meaningful but affordable funeral.

There are resources and help online. People may be eligible for a [government grant](#) (you don't have to pay it back) toward the cost of a funeral for people on qualifying benefits. You can apply for a Funeral Expenses Payment even if you do not use a funeral director. The full amount is unlikely to cover even the cost of a simple funeral, so there is likely to be a shortfall. For free impartial advice and support, contact the National Bereavement Advice Helpline on 0800 0246 121 or go to www.theNBS.org

Other sources of support

In addition to support provided by the parish, there are a number of online resources and links which can provide advice and support and some useful local websites (particularly the Cornwall guide).

NHS	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/
Cornwall	https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/33505704/bereavement-guide-2018.pdf
Devon	https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services/south-west/devon
Dorset	https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/care-and-support-for-adults/information-and-advice-pages/bereavement/help-and-support.aspx

The [Art of Dying Well](#) is a set of resources developed by St Mary's University and includes resources for supporting those dying during the Covid-19 outbreak. It has an excellent guide on telephone befriending at a time of crisis. The NHS, Cruse and some Local Councils also have useful sources of support for anyone facing bereavement. CRUSE is currently only offering online or telephone support and can be accessed through a national helpline FREEPHONE 0808 808 1677.

Appendix A Some issues for bereavement support groups to consider

- Groups need to decide on their composition and format and what they want to achieve before setting up. The Parish Priest needs to be involved from the start.
- People joining the group need to have clear information about what the group can and cannot offer to avoid setting unrealistic expectations
- A leaflet or note setting out how the group runs can help people decide if it is right for them or not. For some people one to one support might be better.
- A group might want to meet in a neutral venue like a café or pub where there is plenty of space and privacy
- Be clear about the possibilities and limits of the group – groups are not there to deal with complex issues arising from those who have experienced traumatic deaths or to provide therapy
- Agree mutual expectations but let the group evolve and be guided by participants as long as the group is bounded and safe and meets the participants' needs.
- Ideally the group should be led by a peer (i.e. bereaved) together with a professional (Priest, counselor, nurse, psychologist). If the group is led by peers only, a professional could be invited to the group to discuss specific topics.
- Group leaders need to have a clear role, understood by the group. As individuals they need to be empathetic and able to facilitate. Ideally, they should have some knowledge about how to lead grief groups. They need to prevent domination of any one participant or closed discussions.
- Groups might find it useful to focus on topics which promote hope and help people find new perspectives but people shouldn't have to work at it – it is okay for people to be where they are at.
- People should be free to dip in and out of a group, not to feel that they have to attend every month. Just ask that they let the group leader know ahead if they're not coming so they know how long to wait for people