

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme
16. Ministering to uncertainty and anxiety

In the final reflection in the series, the Chairman of St Luke's, Edward Martineau, shares with us his thoughts in this period of uncertainty as we ease out of lockdown.

First, to you, our clergy - frontline workers in this time of Covid - we offer our deepest thanks for the myriad ways in which you and your teams are supporting us, the lay community, at this difficult time - whether we be church congregations, hospitals, prisons, the military, schools or the wider community. We recognise the enormous challenges you are facing, not least the complexity of dealing with the emotions of those to whom you minister while at the same time coping with your own emotions and concerns about yourself and your family and friends. Sadly, we know that some of you are facing enormous personal loss and grief.

At St Luke's our desire has always been to 'care for the carers' and help frontline clergy. Our weekly offerings over the past few months have been focused on your own wellbeing and how that in turn impacts on the wellbeing of those to whom you minister.

Now, the virus is subjecting us to a period of wait-and-see: will there be a 'second wave' - or not - and if so, when?

Previous offerings have explored the variety of emotions that individuals may experience, in different degrees of intensity, and at different times. They will remain on our website so that they can be accessed, if needed, in the future.

This article briefly considers two emotions which it seems likely that everyone throughout the country *undoubtedly will* now be experiencing: uncertainty and anxiety.

There can surely be nobody who does not feel uncertainty. And uncertainty brings anxiety as its inevitable travelling companion. And severe anxiety catastrophises - it unleashes an endless series of negative mental '*What ifs....?*'.

The antidote to anxiety is measured reassurance - it needs to be measured, or it will be dismissed. A blanket '*Don't worry*' is worse than useless: it is misleading. There may well be matters about which worry is entirely appropriate. Measured reassurance and a feeling of security and stability are hugely valuable - and their positive message can be as contagious as fear.

What people will seek from you is 'more of the same'. They will *want* to take strength from you, and the love of God that you teach. They will *want* to model their reactions on yours. They will *want* to believe. That is why your own wellbeing is so crucial: if *you* do not model security and stability and the love of God, who will?

With that in mind, we invite you to reflect on what, from our offerings over the past weeks, you have valued, and what has sustained you. What strategies have you employed for keeping yourself sane during this crisis? For it is likely that in the coming months they will still be needed in abundance.

What do we mean by 'reassurance' in this context? To take the word literally, we mean making people more certain of something - but of what? In this context, that 'something' is whatever it is for any given individual that gives their life meaning. For some this will be recognised as the Love of God: for others it may be the initially unrecognised mustard seed which grows to help people to move mountains.

Reassurance is not to impose a set behaviour on anyone, but to encourage people to believe that their possibly faltering faith in God can be shored up, and the positive things for which they yearn can be grasped tenaciously - even if to do so is to follow the path less travelled. The seeds of those positive things will already be in their minds: they are waiting to be drawn out and affirmed - by you.

St Luke's hopes this series of Virtual Wellbeing reflections has been helpful - perhaps thought-provoking - to you over the past months. Our services are available as ever, and we wish you well and hold you in our prayers.

If reading this has led you to want to seek additional support or signposting please contact either the person in your diocese responsible for clergy wellbeing or St Luke's via its website or on [020 7898 1700](tel:02078981700).