

Wellbeing in the Parish: helping PCCs THRIVE

February 2022



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

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Preface

Wellbeing - “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.” (Oxford English Dictionary)

Wellbeing includes satisfaction with job or home, healthy relationships and a sense of purpose and meaning.

‘Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.’ <https://neweconomics.org> June 2021

COVID has brought particular and distinct pressures; opening up emotional fault lines, bringing previously hidden issues to the fore and putting everyone under additional pressure. There are stressors in any crisis that parishes face, but the particular stresses of adaptation, communication, risk management, trauma, emotional loading, loss etc that have surfaced are different anxieties to whatever was normal before. It is more urgent than ever that the importance of wellbeing is recognised and discussed. We offer these materials to prompt the conversation, which we hope will continue through the current pandemic and beyond.

In recent years, the Church of England has put some focus on the question of clergy wellbeing. In February 2020 General Synod adopted the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing, saying:

“Our vision is that the work of supporting clergy in their ministry will become an integral part of the life of the Church and part of the DNA of every aspect of our mission and ministry.”
Revd Canon Simon Butler, Head of the Clergy Covenant Working Group

As important as the specific question of clergy wellbeing is we are conscious that clergy do not operate on their own in parishes. They work closely with others, and the wellbeing of those with whom they work – lay church officers, other laity in church roles, other licensed colleagues, and church employees – is just as important. It is, therefore, important to ask wider questions about whether the culture and practice within a particular PCC and parish is likely to foster the wellbeing of all its members.

These materials are offered so that they can be used supportively and collaboratively by those involved in church leadership, both lay and ordained. We have tended to refer to the PCC as the core leadership team who will use these materials, as we think that is most likely. However, we recognise that each parish or benefice may have other people or groups who are central to church leadership, and you are encouraged to use this pack with the leadership grouping that is most appropriate in your context.

We hope that this set of resources will help churches have meaningful discussions around wellbeing, encourage better working relationships, and assist in improving policy and practice. We see improving wellbeing within the church as an enabler of the church’s mission and ministry, as equipping God’s people better to serve him and one another with joy.

‘I came that they may have life and have it in all its fullness’.
John 10:10b

The Project Team (2022) - Katie de Bourcier, Jane Proudfoot, Stuart Owen and Tiffer Robinson

Introduction

These materials have been produced by a project team who are members of a national church leadership development programme. All have practical experience of church life, ordained and lay ministry and church management.

The inspiration for the project came from the report *How Clergy Thrive: Insights from Living Ministry* published in 2020 by Dr Liz Graveling. This report surveyed clergy in the Church of England and the resulting data was analysed. Six key areas that impact on clergy wellbeing were identified.

The project team have produced materials to complement the report aiming to help PCCs to think about and discuss aspects of wellbeing in their setting. The resources are designed to consider the wellbeing of clergy, lay church officers, lay workers and other PCC members and lead to practical outcomes.

This pack contains materials based around the six key aspects identified by THRIVE:

- T** tune your life to healthy rhythms
- H** handle expectations
- R** recognise times of vulnerability
- I** identify safe spaces to be heard
- V** value and affirm
- E** establish healthy boundaries

For each of the areas there is a small selection of materials comprising a brief preface and some ideas for Biblical reflection, discussion and activity.

It is anticipated that you will select from these materials and decide how to use them. You may want to include some of them in a PCC meeting or organise a specific day or half-day to focus on wellbeing.

There is no expectation that you will work through all the material or work through it in order. We encourage you to be selective according to the needs and context of your PCC and to adapt the materials as you see fit. We recommend that you begin by sharing the triage form with the PCC, in order to identify and prioritise the areas that you most need to concentrate on.

In the pack you will find:

- A preface.
- An explanatory note on how to use the resources.
- A triage form.
- Materials on each of the six THRIVE areas.
- A list of further resources.

Wellbeing in the parish: helping PCCs thrive

How to use these resources:

1. First decide how much time you and your PCC can give to working on this wellbeing material. Will you include wellbeing as an agenda item for your PCC meetings or have a half day or full day when wellbeing is the focus? The pack has various exercises around each of the six THRIVE areas and is designed for you to be able to choose which of the areas to cover and, within the areas, which of the materials you use.
2. To make the best use of the materials in this pack complete the Triage form before your first session. It will help you to assess where your PCC is with regard to wellbeing and what particular areas it might be helpful for you to focus on. Each member should complete their own form and return it to you, prior to your first meeting. This form can then be used again at the end of the session/s or at periods after that (six or twelve months) as a way of measuring what progress your PCC/church has made.
3. All PCCs are different and respond to different ways of working. If your PCC is small, it may be that focussing on one or two of the THRIVE areas in a meeting or meetings is realistic. If you have a larger PCC, you may be able to break off into groups and cover more of the areas. Some of the exercises are more discussion based, some use Scripture to aid understand and some are designed with a creative approach in mind. You can choose what your PCC are most likely to enjoy and get the most out of. Using all of the materials around a particular THRIVE areas will encourage a more rounded and nuanced discussion and understanding. For each of the six THRIVE areas there is an explanatory introduction which should always be used to set the scene and introduce the subject matter.
4. Familiarise yourself with the materials in the pack and prepare the session/s before you start.
5. The pack will have been sent to you electronically so that you can print off additional copies of the sessions for ease of use with groups.
6. Think about how the group/s will feedback and encourage them to turn what they discover into practical action – such as, a change in how the PCC operates, identifying further training/learning needs, policy or mission and ministry priorities.

Wellbeing in the Parish - Triage Form

You're invited to complete the form below, thinking about how the whole leadership team (lay and ordained) of your parish functions. The wellbeing of the members of a group impacts how well the group functions. Likewise, the culture of the group impacts on the wellbeing of individuals. This form is designed to take the temperature of your team in terms of wellbeing, and to identify places in which you can seek to strengthen the ways in which you work together and to help you to consider how you as an individual are feeling, the better to serve God's people in the community you live in.

	Good	OK	Poor
Tune Your Life to Healthy Rhythms			
How much energy do you feel that you have?			
How well rested do you feel?			
How much control do you have over your own time?			
Handle Expectations			
How clearly do you understand your roles and responsibilities as a member of the church leadership team?			
How clearly do other members of the congregation understand your roles and responsibilities?			
Within your church how well do people communicate their expectations?			
Recognise Times of Vulnerability			
How aware are you of what causes feelings of vulnerability in you and others?			
How well do you recognise signs of stress in others?			
How good are members of the church leadership team at recognising when people are struggling?			
Identify Safe Spaces to be Heard			
To what extent do you have spaces where you are listened to?			
How good are members of the church leadership team at listening to other members of the congregation?			
How easy is it to say what's really on your mind in PCC meetings?			
Value and Affirm			
How much do you value what you do for the church?			
How much satisfaction do you get from your work for the church?			
How much do you feel that your contribution is valued?			
Establish Healthy Boundaries			
How well do you manage the time and energy that you give to the church?			
How well do other members of the congregation recognise and understand the pressures on your time?			
How easy do you find it to say 'no' when asked to take on more than you can manage?			

Tune your life to healthy rhythms 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

For some people, one of the great gifts of the Christian faith is the structure it gives to their lives. A 'Rule of Life' or pattern of praying at certain times of the day. Sharing in worship on certain days of the week. The great annual pattern we journey through from Advent Sunday, through Christmas, Lent and Easter, Ordinary Time to All Saints' Sunday.

However, against this great sense of pattern and order, the daily reality of many people, including clergy, is much more fluid and unstructured. Whatever our diary might say the day has in store for us, it will regularly end up bearing no relation to reality. In the case of parish priests, for example, there might be an unexpected visitor on the doorstep seeking help or a sudden bereavement in the parish. For churchwardens, our church buildings are regular sources of disruption as boilers break down and pieces of plaster fall from the ceiling. Across all sorts of different professions people experience similar daily upheavals great and small.

To nurture our wellbeing, we need to find ways to hold these two realities of order and disorder in some sort of creative tension. Finding ways to hold on to structures, even as we respond to those experiences which so often disrupt and threaten to undermine those structures., will help us to thrive.

The important thing to remember is our need to hold on to the order and the disorder, even as they seem to pull us in opposite directions. A person who is so rigid about the structures of their day that they can't respond to the needs of the moment won't be very effective. Similarly, someone who is so caught up in responding to the needs of the moment that their days and weeks lose all meaningful structure, is also unlikely to be effective.

2. Questions for reflection and discussion:

Think of an occasion when your plans for the day/week were disrupted by some unexpected event: describe that experience and reflect on the questions:

- How did the unexpected event make you feel when it happened?
- How did you respond?
- What were the consequences of that event on the plans you had made for that day/week?

Are such experiences of disruption frequent or infrequent?

If they're frequent, how do you manage the effects of that on your with the 'planned events'.

Immediately he [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

Matthew 14:22-25.

What do we learn from Jesus' example about the place of prayer in a healthy rhythm of life?

3. Actions to consider:

Write a list of up to ten things that are in your diary, ranking them from the least flexible to the most flexible.

Discuss your list in groups of two or three. Are you happy with your priorities?

Would you like any of the items you've listed to be higher up your list and more 'protected' in your diary?

Between you, can you think of any strategies that might help to enable those items to be a little better ring-fenced?

Now carry out a similar exercise looking at your PCC's priorities.

Tune your life to healthy rhythms 2

1. Read this passage from Luke 12:16-22 out loud together in your group.

Then Jesus told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.'

2. Bible study

1	Imagine you're the rich man – what gives you pleasure in life?
2	The passage begins with the rich man asking himself the question, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' What other answers might he have come up with to that question, rather than just building ever bigger barns?
3	In the parable, God calls the rich man a fool: in what ways has he been foolish?
	PTO

4	In what ways might the rich man have lived a life in which he was 'rich towards God'?
5	What more is there to life than food and clothing?
6	How might what you've learnt enable our PCC/church to prioritise a healthy rhythm of life for itself and for others?

Tune your life to healthy rhythms 3

1. Imagine that you are cycling up a hill

- What are your 'uphill experiences', the ones that sap your energy?

2. Now imagine taking your feet off the pedals and speeding down the hill.

- What are your 'downhill experiences', the ones that give you energy?

3. What parallels can you see between the experience of cycling and PCC/church life?



3 The rhythms of our lives - instructions

We all have daily, weekly, monthly and even annual patterns to our lives. As Christians, it can be helpful to think consciously about what we include in those patterns, choosing what we want to prioritise. This helps us develop healthy habits and rhythms that can sustain us. This exercise can be done as an individuals or in a small group.

As individuals:

Choose 3-5 activities/practices you would like to include in each of your daily, weekly, monthly and annual patterns. Example activities are included on the next page, and a template to complete is on the third page. You may also want to include other exercises relevant to your own situation, beyond the examples given.

Make it as personal and practical as possible. But remember too that it should be a rhythm “baggy enough to live in” (Matt Haig, *The Comfort Book*), not a counsel of perfection or a rod to beat yourself with!
(If you wish, share what you have come up with)

In small groups:

Print the next page (enlarged if possible) and cut out the activity labels. Spread them out on a table for each group, and invite the groups to discuss which each person would choose to include in their pattern of life, and why. Given them some blank labels to add other practices too.

Invite the groups to reflect on the advantages of developing and maintaining a pattern of life, and the challenges involved.

Following the discussion, individuals may wish to complete the template.

Time outdoors

Bible reading

Time with friends

Prayer

Exercise

Time with family

Quiet day / retreat

Holiday

Rest day(s)

Meeting with other Christians for prayer and worship

Hobbies/ sports/ leisure

Pattern	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity
Daily					
Weekly					
Monthly					
Yearly					

Handle expectations 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

Handling expectations well is dependent on two things; firstly, knowing what others expect of us and secondly, feeling confident to express to what extent we feel able to fulfil those expectations.

A failure to communicate clearly what we expect of people is rooted in all sorts of benign assumptions, which nobody ever feels it necessary to articulate because 'it's just how we do things/have always done things'. Most of us, when we move jobs/churches will discover differences in culture between our old workplace and new which might catch us off guard. These things can catch us unawares because the very essence of an organisation's culture is that it's not a set of guidelines which can be studied and learnt, it's simply lived, it's what's expected, and it's deep-rooted. Most parish clergy probably realise that leading worship on Sunday mornings is expected of them; but they might not know that in this parish there has always been the expectation that the clergy house has an 'open door', or that the Churchwardens get a good bottle of malt at Christmas.

Just as a community's culture is something which is rarely expressed directly in words, so too most of us can find it difficult to put it into words when we're finding something difficult. This can be because we don't want to let other people down or because we don't want to acknowledge that there are things we don't have the capacity to do. There can be all sorts of reasons for not acknowledging that we're finding it difficult to live up to other people's expectations.

Every now and then someone who fulfils a voluntary role in our churches will suddenly announce that they need to stop. Sometimes it's because their personal circumstances have changed, but often they've been struggling with their responsibility for some time and just never felt able to speak to anybody about it.

In essence, handling expectations well is fundamentally rooted in communication which is clear and honest.

PTO

2. Questions for reflection and discussion:

How easy is it for people at our church to say that they need some help, or indeed that maybe they need to take a break?

What pressures are placed on people by:

- a) the expectations of those in church leadership
- b) other people's expectations?
- c) their own sense of duty/obligation?

What happens in our church when someone steps down from doing something?

3. Actions to consider:

What could be done to more clearly articulate our 'unspoken rules'?

What can be done to challenge and amend some of those assumptions where necessary?

Can we look at succession planning where we know that people may stop activities they have done for some time?

Handle expectations 2

1. Read this passage from Matthew 10:5-14 out loud together in your group.

Jesus sent out the twelve with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.

2. Bible study

In this passage we read of Jesus sending out the twelve apostles as his first missionaries. They come from different backgrounds, with no particular training for this work. They are still figuring out who Jesus really is. But he entrusts this task to them nonetheless.

1	What are Jesus' stated expectations of the twelve?
2	What limits does he set on what he expects of them?
	PTO

3	How would you have felt if he had given you this commission, with these expectations and also these limits on expectations?
4	We know the disciples did not always live up to their calling: think of Peter trying to dissuade Jesus from his path of suffering (Matthew 16:21-23), and later betraying him (Matthew 26:69-75); or James and John arguing over who would be greatest in heaven (Matthew 20:20-28). What is Jesus' response when his disciples seem to let him down?
6	How would you sum up what we learn from Jesus about managing our expectations of each other?

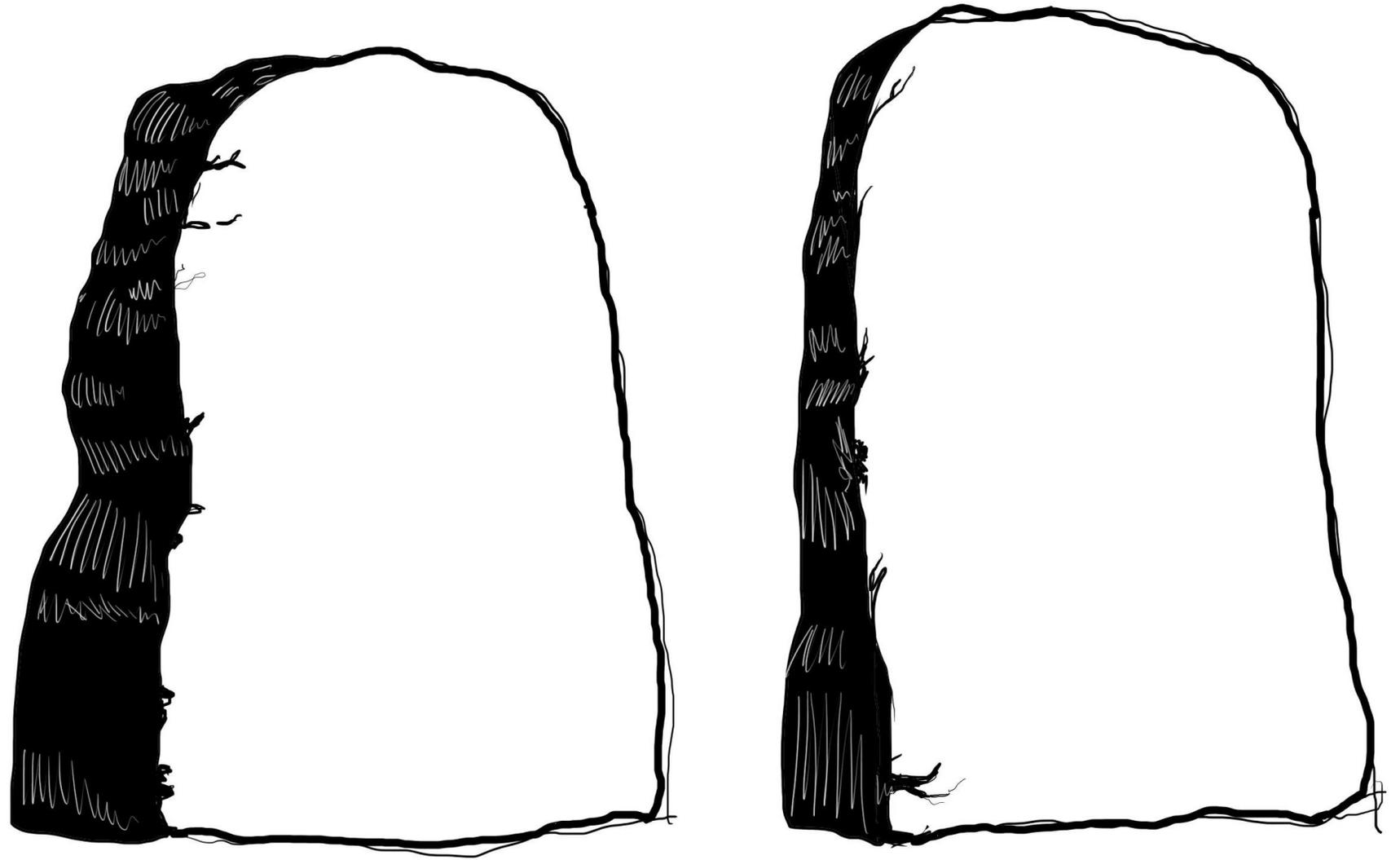
Handle expectations 3

Please have fun with this.

What would you say are the 'unspoken rules' of our church?

Assemble a 'Ten Commandments' of things which are expected in our church and write them on these tablets of stone!

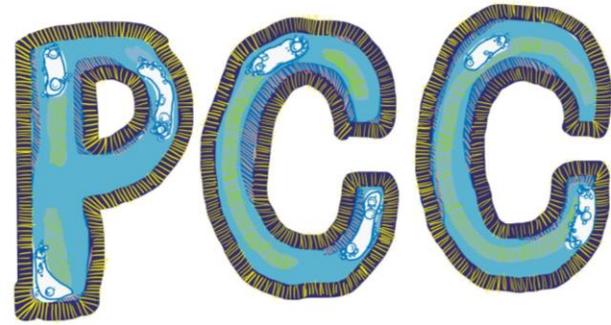
Have any serious points about the level of expectation been revealed in this exercise.



Use this sheet to draw in the lines of communication that operate in our church. Identify where there is good and poor communication by using different colours to draw solid lines, broken lines, prickly lines and wobbly lines. What works well and what could be improved upon?



Clergy



PCC

St Illtud's Church, Llanfihel, Wales



Congregation



Community

Recognise times of vulnerability 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

Most of us will recognize that there are certain rhythms to our lives, in terms of our energy levels and sense of motivation.

At training events and conferences, the session immediately after lunch is sometimes called the 'graveyard slot'. Once we've eaten we often have a dip in our energy, we might feel tired or even sleepy, and our attention is not as sharp as it might be at other times. We might experience similar rhythms in the course of the week. As a working week draws to its close, some people have a sense of their motivation beginning to wane, and tasks which they tackled easily at the start of the week now feel onerous and uninspiring.

When we're tired and struggling with motivation, we become more vulnerable: vulnerable to making mistakes, vulnerable to misunderstanding others, vulnerable to responding with heightened emotion when problems arise.

Lots of other factors can have a similar effect on us. You've probably read those lists about the most stressful life events: the death of a loved one, starting a new job, problems with money, the demands of work, moving home, starting a relationship and indeed ending one. What's striking about these events is how commonplace they are. Most of us, I'm sure, could think of several people going through one or more of these experiences at any given time.

When we're going through such times, or people close to us are, then we can become vulnerable, and we struggle to cope with all sorts of other experiences which ordinarily we would take in our stride.

In times of vulnerability, one of the things that can be adversely affected is our ability to make good decisions about our own wellbeing, and that can include the decision to seek help, whether through something as simple as talking over how we're feeling with a friend, through to seeking professional help.

PTO

2. Questions for reflection and discussion:

Think of times when you have been vulnerable in the past, and what sort of challenges has that posed for you? Have you always been good at recognising these?

People often put a brave face on things when going through times of vulnerability. What are the obstacles to more openness and honesty?

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Read Galatians 6:1-5 as a group.

Reflect on the balance between “bearing one another’s burdens”, and “bearing one’s own load”.

How does the Christian understanding of humility as a virtue relate to vulnerability?

Does the culture of your church help people to recognise times of vulnerability and or does it sometimes hinder them?

3. Actions to consider:

List some ways you could help to support one another through times of vulnerability.

Make a list of where there are pinch points in church life that might make people feel particularly vulnerable, and how they might be better anticipated and dealt with?

Recognising times of vulnerability 2

1. Read this passage from John 4:5-16, 27-30 out loud together in your group.

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

2 Bible study

1	In this passage, we read of Jesus venturing into different territory, where he has an encounter with a Samaritan woman. Jews would not normally associate with Samaritans, and even less so with a Samaritan woman. Thinking of the two main characters in this story, Jesus and the woman, how are each vulnerable in this situation?
2	Jesus offers the woman 'living water'. However, she struggles to see behind the physical water from the well that is so essential to physical life. What do you understand by "living water"?
3	How does it feel to be thirsty for physical water – H ₂ O? How does it feel to be thirsty for the living water of Jesus?
4	Our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wells can sometimes run dry when life's challenges take too much out of us, leaving us vulnerable. What helps you replenish these wells? Who helps you replenish these wells?
	PTO

5	The woman experiences a particular kind of vulnerability when she realises that Jesus knows about her relationship history. How does this vulnerability prove life changing for her?
6	The woman experiences a particular kind of vulnerability when she realises that Jesus knows about her relationship history. How does this vulnerability prove life changing for her?
7	Through this vulnerable encounter between the woman and Jesus, the life of a community is transformed as the good news is shared. How can our vulnerability, with each other and with God, be a positive means of transformation in our lives?

Recognising times of vulnerability 3

Self-recognition

It is important for members of the PCC, clergy and key people within the church to take care of each other's wellbeing. Being aware of the triggers that affect wellbeing and having an understanding and appreciation of other people's characters and needs can help them to form strategies and systems for support.

However, it is also important for us all to be aware of our own wellbeing and check-in on ourselves regularly.

While some people are happy to share and talk about themselves and how they are feeling, others would feel uncomfortable with this. Being honest with oneself is essential in order to recognise any issues that may be affecting your wellbeing at an early stage.

There are several online questionnaires that can be accessed which, while anonymous, offer a wellbeing score and direct you to help if you need it. Try this one:

<https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing/wellbeing-assessment-tool>

What to do if you realise that your wellbeing is compromised:

- Try to identify where the problem lies. What are the things in your life that are causing you stress?
- Talk to a friend, trusted person or family member.
- Is there someone in the church community you feel able to talk to?
- Find out what help your Diocese can offer.
- If the situation is serious contact a health professional.

What NOT to do if your wellbeing is compromised:

- Ignore it.
- Feel guilty.
- Bottle it up.
- Assume people will know without you telling them.
- See it as a weakness or fault.

Discuss in your group times when you've needed help and either asked for it or not asked for it. What can you learn from these experiences that may improve our PCC/church's ability to help in times of vulnerability?

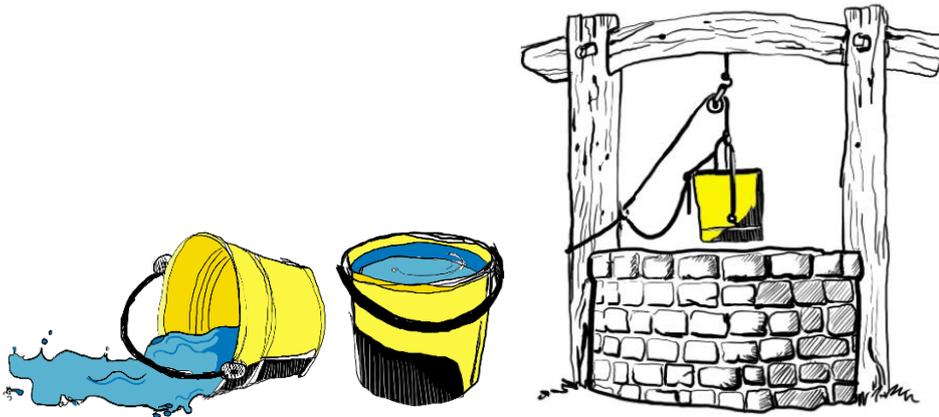
Remember – it's OK not to feel OK.

1. Images to help you think about vulnerability.

THE WELL

When our wellbeing is good, we have a great potential to draw deeply from the well of life. It's like our bucket is always full of water and if we need to draw deeper there's plenty of reserve.

- Play around with this metaphor, push it as far as you can.
- Consider the metaphor of the dry well and the spilled bucket.



THE BUMPY ROAD

The road of life is rarely straightforward, there are twists and turns and potholes along the way.

- Discuss this as a metaphor for wellbeing and its challenges.
- Try drawing your life as a road, how would you depict the times when the driving was easy and the times when the going got tough?



PTO

2. Defining (your) VULNERABILITY

Thinking about how you feel when you are at your best which of the following words would you choose?

Can you narrow it down to your top 5?

Calm		Purposeful		Comfortable	
Relaxed		Joyful		Healthy	
Organised		Optimistic		Positive	
Happy		Hopeful		Energised	
Content		On top of things		Resilient	
Strong		Coping		Emotionally stable	

- Compare your list with a partner (or in your group) and talk about times when you have felt like this. What was happening in your life at the time?

Different things can make us feel vulnerable and affect our wellbeing and it can be different for each individual.

Notice how what stresses one person can energise another.

1	Now consider what might/can jeopardise your state of wellbeing. Make a list like the one above.

- Compare your list with a partner (or in your group), only sharing what you are happy to share.
- Chat about how you might notice times of vulnerability in other people. Discuss what you might be able to do to help at those times.

In an ideal world, times of vulnerability are recognised, either by the individual concerned or by those around them, and mechanisms are in place to give support. How might our PCC do that?

Identify safe spaces to be heard 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

Most of us will have had the experience, even if only in childhood, of sharing a confidence with someone which was then treated carelessly or callously, and shared with others. Finding the courage to actually speak to someone in the first place can be costly in itself, so the betrayal is doubly bitter. We learn to think carefully about who we speak to, who we trust with our innermost thoughts, hopes and fears.

Conversely, most of us will have had experiences of the pain that can be caused when we 'bottle things up', and don't share with at least one other person, something that's troubling us.

As the BT advert used to remind us, "It's good to talk".

We know how important it can be to talk about things which are troubling us, and we also know how important it can be to speak to the right people; to find spaces in which we can be heard safely.

We sometimes speak of our church communities as 'families'. Just as with our families, all sorts of problems can arise when someone says the wrong thing to the wrong person. Equally hurt can be caused when important truths are left unspoken. There are some conversations which should remain entirely confidential, and, especially with regard to safeguarding, some which are required to be disclosed.

For a church 'family' to remain healthy, it's important that people have places where they can be heard when they need to speak. Those places need to be places of safety, both for the person who needs to speak, and the one who is there to listen.

PTO

2. Use the following questions for reflection and discussion:

- Where have you seen positive examples of where you could 'feed back' what you were thinking about something?
- Think of a time when you shared a concern and were really listened to: describe how that felt.
- Have you ever been in a situation where you really needed to speak with someone, but there was nobody there for you to speak to: how did it feel?
- Why is confidentiality important for some kinds of conversation? What is the impact if that trust is lost?
- What might happen when people involved in church leadership feel they have nowhere they can reflect on the serious challenges they face in the course of their role?
- What might make a space 'unsafe' to be heard in?

PLEASE REMEMBER: ANY DISCLOSURE OF RECENT OR NON-RECENT ABUSE MUST BE DISCLOSED TO THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES E.G. THE DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING OFFICER AND/OR THE POLICE.

3. Actions to consider:

Think of ways our church community could build safe spaces for people to share concerns or feedback without judgement. Perhaps a standing agenda item, or a suggestions box?

Think about who cares for the carers in your congregation e.g. the vicar, the Pastoral Worker, the Church warden and others who provide a listening ear.

It can be good to find safe spaces outside of your immediate context. Think of people you trust to understand and be confidential who aren't involved currently in our church.

Identify safe spaces to be heard 2

1. Read Ruth 1:1-21 out loud together in your group.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.' Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you, or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' She said to them, 'Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?'

PT O

2. Bible study

1	Discuss how Naomi's safe space was compromised when her husband and sons died.
2	Working in pairs one of you imagine you are Naomi. Express your fears to Ruth in your own words. The second person in the pair needs to listen carefully without interruption and then repeat back what they have heard.
3	Imagine you are Ruth and read again what she said to Naomi (v16-17). Discuss how Ruth made it possible for Naomi to trust her.
4	How could Naomi's community in Bethlehem have helped her to feel safe and secure?
5	How might what you have discovered help you to create a safer environment for honest and open conversations in our PCC/church?

Identifying safe spaces to be heard 3

1. Understanding your COMFORT ZONE

Consider these individually first and then, with a partner, share your thoughts. Take it in turns to listen.

Choose 3 words to describe how you feel about each 'place'.



Look at this next set of circles and complete the exercise above again.

Are there any overlaps? Is that good or bad?

Safe spaces are different for everyone.

Identifying yours can help you to know where to go when things are difficult.



If any of these questions raise difficult issues for you, please seek help

The freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline is 0808 2000 247

To find out more about active listening visit

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/how-to-talk-about-health-problems/active-listening>

Value and affirm 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

At the heart of the Gospel is the promise that all people are so profoundly loved and valued by God, that God sent his Son that we might have life, 'and have it abundantly.' (Jn 10:10).

Knowing that we are valued makes an important contribution to our sense of wellbeing, and conversely if that affirmation is missing, it's easy to find ourselves struggling.

There are several factors which can undermine our ability to properly value one another.

In many of our churches, it can feel like more and more jobs are being divided up between fewer people. In addition to that, the jobs themselves can come with increasingly weighty responsibilities and expectations attached.

The combination of these factors can sometimes make it difficult to take the time to properly recognise and value the contribution that others are making. Indeed, those very pressures can lead to stress and conflict. This can make people more inclined to express criticism when problems loom on the horizon.

In addition it can feel that the church as a whole is not particularly valued by wider society and that people are indifferent to what we believe and some of the things we do.

Of course, not all of these factors are at play in every church, but it's important to consider their presence in each context, and to examine if they might be exerting strain on the wellbeing of our church community.

2. Questions for reflection and discussion:

Is it true that in our church there are times when we find ourselves trying to do 'more with less'?

If so, what factors contribute to that situation?

How is our church viewed in the wider community? Do the ways in which we're perceived by that community, have an impact on how we view and value ourselves and what we do?

PTO

'Nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.' 1 Thessalonians 2:6-9

Discuss what difference you think these words would have made to the church members who first heard them in Thessalonica?

Why do you make the contribution that you do to this church? Who do you do it for?
Do you feel that what you do for the church is valued?

- If so, how does that express itself?

- If not, what would help to make you feel that your contribution is valued?

3. Actions to consider:

Think of a time when you joined a new group of people – a social group, a workplace, school or university, or a new church, and felt really welcomed and included. List all the ways in which you were made to feel valued in that community.

In the past year, how many of those forms of affirmation have you received from other members of the church community?

Where are the gaps in the expressions of ongoing affirmation which we offer one another as more established members of the church? Could 'plugging' some of those gaps enhance our wellbeing as part of the church leadership team?

Value and affirm 2

1. Read this passage from Luke 15:11-32 out loud together in your group.

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So, he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So, he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Bible study

In groups take on a character then discuss the parable, remaining in character as one of the following:

- The younger son
- The father
- The older son

PTO

1	In what way were you valued and by whom? How did that make you feel?
2	In what ways were you de-valued and by whom? How did that make you feel?
3	Were you at any point affirmed (praised or encouraged)?
4	How could the community around each character have offered affirmation?
5	Have fun re-writing the parable making each character both valued and affirming and then share your 'new' parable with the other groups.
6	How will what you have learnt change the way our PCC/ church affirms and values its members?

Value and affirm 3

You will need post-it notes for this activity

1. Give each person 3 post-it notes (it will help if they are different colours).

- On the first one write something you value as one of your own personal qualities.
- On the second write down something you value about our church leadership (remember that's lay and ordained and includes the PCC).
- On the third one write something you value about our church in general.

Once everyone's responses have been completed display them under the headings – people, leadership and church.

2. Take time to look at the three sets of responses and then reflect on these questions:

1	Which responses were largely as you expected?
2	Were there any responses which surprised you?
3	Do these responses suggest any changes we need to make in how we work together as a PCC?

3. Now give everyone as many post-it notes as you have people in the group (ie. 4 people working together = 4 post-it notes each).

Each person should write an **affirming** sentence about each of the other members of their group. Keep your sentences to yourself.

When you've finished stick your post-it notes on the backs of the people you've written about. Walk around reading, silently, what has been written.

Then allow each person to read what has been written about them.

1	How did the exercise make you feel?
2	Were you surprised by anything that was said?
3	Can you think of ways in which our PCC/church could be more affirming of its members?

Establish healthy boundaries 1

1. Introduction - take a few minutes to read this out loud in your group. Afterwards take a few minutes for silent reflection.

We all live in an increasingly 'connected' world. During the period of the Coronavirus pandemic, that ability to connect was a real blessing in all sorts of ways. It allowed family members who couldn't meet in person to stay in face-to-face contact, enabled many to work from home, made home-schooling less onerous, and it allowed congregations to continue to worship together on a regular basis.

However, it's also true that our hyper-connected culture has its darker side. Where once a school bully could be left at the school gate, now they can invade your home via social media. Similarly, for some people the ability to work from home has led to an increased blurring between personal time (and space) and work time: a 2021 report by Harvard Business Review found that of the 1500 workers they surveyed, 90% felt that their work-life balance was getting worse (www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56495463).

Our ability to connect so easily increases the need for us to have good boundaries.

In many ways, church communities want to keep the boundaries between members to a minimum. We often put a great deal of thought and energy into helping people get to know one another and form meaningful friendships, and rightly so.

However, the ease with which we can connect, makes it especially important that we think with care about when and how we connect, and when and how we allow one another to disconnect.

It's perhaps worth remembering that the very first verses of the Bible (Genesis 1) could be viewed as a litany of boundaries being created, as the light is separated from the darkness, the waters from the land, and so on.

Good boundaries can help creativity and community to flourish.

2. Questions for reflection and discussion:

In what ways do we seek to build good relationships within our church and to help members connect with one another?

Are there boundaries/obstacles that can make it difficult for people to feel included and welcomed in our church?

PTO

Make a list of as many negative and positive words that you can think of associated with boundaries.

NEGATIVE

POSITIVE

In what ways do we actively seek to put boundaries around parts of our church life? Why do we do this? You might want to start by thinking about issues around safeguarding and data protection.

What do we mean by 'healthy boundaries' and in what ways do they contribute to our wellbeing as both individuals and as a church community?

3. Actions to consider:

Under the headings 'Healthy Boundaries' and 'Unhealthy Boundaries', list as many examples of each that you can think of. Once you've finished your lists, reflect together on what examples of each we might have in our church community.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

UNHEALTHY BOUNDARIES

On the basis of this exercise, are there boundaries that could be put in place which would further enhance the wellbeing of our church and its members?

Establishing healthy boundaries 2

1. Read this passage from Mark 10:13-16 out loud together in your group.

People were bringing little children to 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.

2. Bible study

Establishing healthy boundaries requires wisdom and discernment. The wrong boundaries can hurt us or others, and the cause of the gospel. The right ones can be life-giving.

1	What boundary does Jesus break down in this passage?
2	Why did the disciples want that boundary in place?
3	What adverse effect would that boundary have had?
	PTO

4	In our church life, are there potentially unhelpful boundaries that need to be challenged?
5	In today's culture, what necessary boundaries would we have in place in a similar situation to this?
6	In other situations, Jesus himself sometimes seeks to get away from the crowd, rather than welcoming them. When is it helpful for those in church roles to be unavailable to others?
7	How can we respect each other's good boundaries?

Establish healthy boundaries 3

-
- On a large sheet of paper draw the basic floor plan of our church building. Be sure to include all the doors and different areas serving different functions etc.
 - Together think about where the boundaries and barriers, visible and invisible are. For instance, are some areas reserved for particular people or activities?
 - Where you think these are healthy boundaries mark them in green and, where they are unhealthy, mark them in red.
 - Discuss which other boundaries and barriers exist in our church life, not associated with the building.



Further Resources

The Living Ministry Resources include a list of sources and support and the original THRIVE research <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry/ministry-development/living-ministry>

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is intended for women and there is a separate one for men – see <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>.

Mental health charity Mind, for help on managing your mental health <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

For someone to speak to confidentially Samaritans if you're having a hard time or are suicidal <https://www.samaritans.org/> or ring their national helpline 116 1234

Every Mind Matters is an NHS resource that provides expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

Bridge Builders provides training and shares resources and ideas to support church leaders and congregations in the challenging task of living as models of reconciliation. <https://www.bbministries.org.uk/>

PCC Tonight, run by CPAS. Sample sessions and PCC resources for PCC support available as well as the full course. <https://www.cpas.org.uk/browse-everything/pcc-tonight-free-resources>

Acorn Christian Healing Foundation, in particular for resources to support *Listening skills* <https://acornchristian.org/>

Penn University Wellbeing questionnaires – Martin Seligman – Author of *Flourish: A new understanding of Happiness and Well-Being – and how to achieve them*. Pub: Nicholas Brealey, 2011.

Positive Psychology – The Signature Strengths Test rank orders from a list of 24 strengths, organised into 6 areas – see below. Many of these are Christian virtues.

Tune your life to healthy rhythms

The Retreat Association <https://www.retreats.org.uk/>

Beyond Busyness: Time Wisdom for Ministry - Stephen Cherry, Sacristy Press, 2012.

Do nothing to change your life – Stephen Cottrell, CHP, 2007.

Handle expectations

Dare to lead : Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts, Brené Brown – Vermilion, 2018.

Sustaining Leadership : You are more important than your ministry by Paul Swann - The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2018.

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman – TH Press, 2019.

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality by Peter Scazzero - Zondervan Trade, 2017.

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life by Dr Henry Cloud and Dr John Townsend, Zondervan; Enlarged edition, 2017.

Skills for Collaborative Ministry by Sally Nash, Jo Pimlott, and Paul Nash, SPCK, 2008.

Recognise times of vulnerability

Wintering: the power of rest and retreat in difficult times - Katherine May, Rider, 2020.

Learning to walk in the dark: Because God often shows up at night- Barbara Brown Taylor, Canterbury Press, 2015.

The gifts of imperfection, Daring Greatly, Braving the Wilderness - Brene Brown, Penguin, 2020.

Tragedy and Congregations website <https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/>

Identify safe spaces to be heard

Pastoral Principles for living well together

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/PAG-PP-website.pdf>

London Centre for Spiritual Direction <https://www.lcsd.org.uk/>

Value and affirm

PERMA model for a holistic view of wellbeing <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>

Practicing Affirmation : God-Centred Praise of Those Who Are Not God, Sam Crabtree, Crossway, 2011.

Establish healthy boundaries

Boundaries: When to say yes : How to say no to take control of your life, John Townsend, ed. Henry Cloud, Zondervan, 2017 (2nd edition).

Love Is a Choice: The Definitive Book on Letting Go of Unhealthy Relationships, Thomas Nelson; Revised edition, 2010.

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