

The Reverend Juliet Stephenson was ordained in 2004. While she was a parish priest she became interested in how good funeral ministry can be influential in the work of churches and communities. After working in market towns, rural farming communities and city suburbs, Juliet now is based in Diocese of Liverpool creating a company of Christian Funeral Celebrants.

The company aims to support work of funeral directors and parishes by offering professional, pastoral and compassionate ministers to listen carefully to families who seek to celebrate a life in a unique and bespoke way, enabling parish clergy to deliver good services to bereaved families in their care.

During Dying Matters week, which runs from 13th – 20th May, Juliet asks us ‘Are we ready?’ She says we can look at death from many angles but as a vicar and a director of the new company her first thoughts turn to preparing for her own funeral. She said:

“For too long, we have felt squeamish about talking about death. It’s almost like ‘if we talk about death - we will die tomorrow’ But just consider how many times you have spent your imaginary lottery winnings in your head when you buy a ticket – Are you a millionaire? Well, at least you will know how to best indulge your prize fund when it does come your way.

“So, just by talking about death, dying and funerals doesn’t make death come any sooner, but at least we will know what decisions we have made with our closest family and friends, which will make the inevitable questions more easily answered.

“The Church of England for many years, has sat in the midst of these conversations. We live a faith based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death is at the heart of our faith. And the funerals that are led by Church of England Ministers, are filled with the life story of the deceased, wrapped in the ultimate story of love and hope and heaven.

“And yet, we seem to shy away from these conversations. Well...shy away no more, as there is a brilliant resource available to help you facilitate these discussions, in your churches, meetings, youth clubs, schools, chaplaincies.

“You may have heard of ‘Death Café’, well the Church of England has produced a version of this called GRAVE TALK. This is a simple way to help people in your community get together and talk about death, dying and funerals in a relaxed easy context of a café space.

“Small groups, gather and consider a series of questions that help get a conversation going. There are no right or wrongs, just sharing of experiences and consideration of different ways of thinking. For example, the question ‘what does it mean to die with dignity?’ will enable all sorts of discussions to flow.

“On Friday 19th May, we are supporting the Dying Matters during **Liverpool Light Night** by holding Death Café ‘Grave Talk’ session at the Cathedral in the Lady Chapel.”

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