

Revd Dr Rebecca Aechtner, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Scotforth, Lancaster, writes about living with Long Covid after contracting the virus in March



For three weeks I stayed in bed, as I struggled with an unrelenting fever, headaches, and breathlessness. At the time my husband also had symptoms and our two young daughters were home from school.

I began to feel better slowly and my temperature and breathing eased. The fatigue remained, but I associated it with my busy parish, figuring out online worship and remote learning. Every few weeks my Covid-19 symptoms re-emerged and I began to think that my ongoing symptoms were more than just pandemic weariness.

I have always been able-bodied and fit, so I struggled to come to terms with my lack of mobility and fitness. By the end of January my symptoms worsened.

Some days I was unable to get out of bed and I struggled to speak and breathe. Even normal daily tasks became a burden. I am now receiving care from various consultants, but I've had to slow down, pace myself, and learn to prioritise.

I've had to wrestle with the fear of my own physical limitations, and doubt of whether I'll return to my pre-Covid energy levels. I am the vicar of a wonderfully busy urban parish and have spent 16 months learning to serve while also being served.

I am now much more aware of my body and what it means to embody my priesthood, with each breath taken, every word spoken, and sacrament shared.

Given my breathlessness, I've become more mindful and intentional in my speech and actions.

I preach and preside leaning against the altar, literally grounding myself in word and sacrament. When I celebrate the Eucharist and give thanks for the broken body of Christ, I understand his presence in a new way, both crucified and resurrected, both wounded and restored.

I continue to pray for healing and am learning to find rest for my soul and body at the invitation of Christ who welcomes the weary and burdened to his table.

- *A group has been formed, meeting with the Bishop of London, to explore how best to support clergy with Long Covid and to look into the longer term impact on ministry and the care of congregations.*