

Pastoral Encounters During COVID-19

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
14 th July 2020	1	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This guidance should be read alongside [guidance](#) on opening cathedral and church buildings to the public and the [Government guidance](#) for people who work or volunteer in heritage locations.

As churches and cathedrals reopen for individual prayer and public worship, we can anticipate that a higher proportion than usual of those who come into our buildings will be experiencing some form of personal pain or trauma. Those who welcome them are engaged in pastoral encounters which require particular support and attentiveness. Some will be in pain because of their own recent experiences. That pain might manifest itself physically, emotionally or spiritually. Other apparently disconnected experiences from the past may surface having been triggered by this new experience. Mental health in particular may be impacted negatively. Many people will have resources personally or in their networks of relationships to deal with these matters but others will not. Some may value speaking to someone outside of their immediate personal orbit. Staff or volunteers who will engage in these encounters should be prepared for them, aware of their own needs and vulnerabilities, and offered appropriate support.

All good pastoral process should be adhered to but with heightened awareness as a result of COVID-19. Consideration of the following issues will assist those having front line pastoral encounters:

- Address each person, however they present, to you as a valued child of God, unique and precious.
- Ensure good role descriptions are in place for all those in pastoral roles. Consider revising these in the light of COVID-19.
- Ensure clear operational policies and procedures are in place in relation to the management and care of people in our church spaces e.g. what to do if a situation becomes violent or is perceived to be threatening. Be aware of physical distancing and other risk management processes in relation to meeting and speaking.
- Point to other agencies which offer specialist help both locally and nationally recognising the limitations of the expertise we hold.
- Ensure familiarity with Safeguarding Policies and Procedures especially in relation to people with vulnerabilities.
- Share information within an established framework of pastoral confidentiality ensuring that issues of personal data management are established.

- Consider good practice from other parallel provision such as [‘Ask for Angela’](#) in relation to domestic violence or other resources to create a safe and welcoming environment.
- Provide some form of local pastoral reflection so that those in these pastoral roles feel supported and also learn from their practice and connect it to the riches of resources within our Christian faith.
- Give permission for volunteers to revise their commitments in the light of their own vulnerabilities.
- Ensure public prayer and church communications celebrate this vital ministry sharing stories of God’s compassion and care at work.