
Breaking bad news

Covid-19 reminder for Clergy.

Pastoral care of those whose relatives are seriously ill and to the bereaved.



LLE MAE FFYDD
YN CYFRIF

WHERE FAITH
MATTERS

16 APRIL 2020

Diocese of Llandaff

Breaking bad news

Pastoral care of those whose relatives are seriously ill and to the bereaved.

Clergy should only engage with face to face encounters when government advice allows, so many of these occasions may be via telephone or any of the various video methods. These notes are a checklist/reminder of good practice for those under pressure. We have huge experience amidst our clergy and much of the following will be instinctive to many. Remember to take advice from a healthcare professional if the person you are talking to is themselves infected with Covid-19.

Find the most appropriate place available

It may be necessary to ensure that any conversation is 'private enough' for the participants – ensure your room is private and free from distractions and reassure the other party that you are in a private place.

Be honest and open

You may be privy to limited information, be honest about what it is that you know and what it is that you don't know (it's easy to give your own opinion which may not be based on fact).

Body language / posture (whether by video or in person)

Try to be at the same level as the person to whom you are talking and try to adopt an open posture (even if that is not how you are feeling inside). Try also to be culturally appropriate (e.g. for some cultures eye contact is not the norm, especially between a man and a woman).

Keep the message short and clear

Keep it as factual as you can, facilitate getting the facts from healthcare professionals if appropriate.

In the case of the bereaved use words like dead and death

Avoid using euphemisms like 'lost', 'passed'.

Ensure information you share is understandable

Try to leave them with good and safe information about where to go next and where to get support locally/nationally (if they have travelled a long distance).

Give time to listen and respect silence

There is good evidence which tells us that, especially when people are bereaved, they do not really notice the silence – they are often going over things in their heads. Silence can be an excruciating time for those offering support, hold the silence with them. Research shows that during these times generally people are just glad to have someone else there.

Be prepared for a range of responses

Responses range from silence to extreme distress and even to strange grief reactions 'but I was going to cook a favourite meal tonight'Be there and be accepting of the responses. Bear in mind that if you feel there is any danger to you and others (e.g. violence, infection) ensure there is a safe exit route (position yourself at a distance and near the door).

Express sorrow and regret

These are dreadful times and this is a dreadful experience.

Ensure they have support

If you are unable to stay hand them over to someone else who will be able to tell them what happens next.

Tears

It is alright to shed tears, but only if the focus of the encounter does not then become you instead of the people that you are there to care for.

Get support for yourself

Via your Archdeacon (who can also signpost you to ongoing support), Spiritual Director or some other trusted, confidential resource.

We are unashamedly Christian and have a message of hope and Resurrection. This is not a point for evangelism but to show God's love and care for the individuals in the most appropriate way.



Accept help

This may be help from colleagues, from the Diocese from suitable volunteers. If you become ill in any way do not battle on regardless – take time to rest and recuperate.

This [article by Dr Rob Archer](#) is a useful read for any one experiencing feelings of anxiety.



