

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme

5. Prayer, wellbeing and our rootedness in God

We know that our rootedness in God (and therefore also our wellbeing) is closely linked to the health of our prayer life. Most of us have well-established practices of prayer, fasting and contemplation. However, given the current challenges and anxieties, we may need to dig deeper into patterns that have served us well - perhaps by returning to spiritual classics that have nourished us in the past. Perhaps some of us can use the time that self-isolation brings to return to the deep regularity of prayer that was part of our ordination charism; take time to read and study the Bible.

Fuelling prayer

However, the new circumstances might call us to pray in new ways and we may feel it is a good time to seek out new patterns. For many of us this is a time of stress and trauma, whether it comes from our own stress or from empathising with the stress and trauma of others. Carrying the burdens of stress and consequent anxieties has the potential to draw us away from prayer. But the converse is possible: these burdens can be the raw materials of a deeper and more urgent life of prayer.

Take a moment to reflect on the following:

- Can art or writing help me to express difficult and turbulent emotions at this time? *Pray that the Holy Spirit will be in my creativity. Having created, interrogate what sits before me: where is God in my painting? What is God saying to me here?*
- Do I feel called to pray more systematically than ever before - for members of my congregation, my family and my friends who are vulnerable, or are health-workers or in other key roles?
- Do I feel drawn to pray in a new way for the future of my community? *Can I imagine a rebirth of community life - stronger links between neighbours, more engagement, more sharing? Can I imagine myself into such a future, and pray as I go. It may help to use a map, walking in imagination the streets or lanes of my parish.*

Finding the best way

Normally, when preparing and leading liturgies, services and prayers, we can focus so much on what will work well for others that we fail to enter into the prayer ourselves. We bring ourselves before God as part of the offering of our lives, and pray to be protected from its dangers. However, worship at this time takes on a new dimension, being undertaken at home, alone or through electronic media. We can choose to embrace the newness as a change from a familiar diet. Many of us will not have the technological means at our disposal to reach our parishioners via social media or holding services electronically; many of us will be relying on telephone contact to be with them. Each of us is finding the best way we can to be with God, with our congregation and community and our loved ones.

At this time we are reminded that we seek to align ourselves with God's perspective, not to present God with ours. Nicola Slee expresses this beautifully in the following prayer:

*Give me the resolution to say 'No' to the good
so that I will be ready to say 'Yes' to the better.*

*Give me the courage to keep living in the open-endedness of the future without foreclosing the mysterious
work of your Spirit in my haste or fear.*

Give me the persistence to stay in the wilderness of unknowing until I am ready to receive your call.

*Give me the strength to keep still and keep waiting
when all about me is pushing towards movement and activity and choice.*

*Give me the acceptance to live these days in uneventfulness, simplicity and hiddenness,
without craving excitement, distraction or change.*

*Give me the grace to live in the emptiness of 'not doing',
without the rewards of achievement, fulfilment or success.*

*Give me the wisdom to discriminate between my own impatience to move forward and your Spirit's deep
stirring of my spirit when the time is right to move.*

*Give me the faith to trust in your obscurity,
the obedience to stay faithful to your mystery,
the courage to keep tryst with your inscrutability.*

- Nicola Slee Praying Like a Woman, SPCK, London 2004 (p54)

If reading this has led you to want to seek additional support or signposting please contact either the person in your diocese responsible for clergy wellbeing or St Luke's via its website or on 020 7898 1700.

This reflection is adapted from a longer article by Michele Hampson, honorary adult psychiatrist and priest in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. Michele's reflections on relatedness and rhythm will also feature in the Virtual Wellbeing Programme in future weeks. The full article is available on the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20mental%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf>