

## Ministry of Consolation

*The Lord Yahweh will wipe away the tears from every cheek. (Isaiah 25:8)*

Following our Diocesan Consultation-Forward Together in Hope, one of the key themes to emerge was how, as a Christian community can we better accompany those who are dying and those who are bereaved. **The Order of Christian Funerals –Page 4** states that *“the ministry of consolation rests with the believing community, which heeds the words and example of the Lord Jesus” Blessed are they who mourn; they will be consoled—(Matthew 5:3)*

A small team comprising the Head of the Department for Spirituality, a Diocesan Priest, a Sister for Christian Community, a Consultant in Palliative Care and a Laywoman spent a considerable time reflecting on how to prepare those people in our diocese who felt they would like to be involved in developing a more focused Ministry of Consolation. To this end fifteen people from across the diocese were invited to participate in a pilot course exploring ways in which this very important ministry might be developed. As the course proceeded it became obvious that not only were there elements of training but more importantly participants were embarking on a personal journey of formation in which they were discerning their possible calling, and motivation for, this area of Christian Ministry. For participants and the team leading this exploratory course it has been immensely creative; most informative; truly challenging and very joyful. The commitment of participants has been inspiring.

During the four afternoon sessions of our exploration we considered the impact of change and transition in our lives and how such adapting, challenges us physically; emotionally and spiritually. We then went on to consider the enormous impact of different losses in our lives and especially loss through illness and death. The questions of how we cope, who understands, who accompanies us in loss and how our church responds became important areas for reflection. What emerged from these questions was the need for sensitive and compassionate listening. Listening—to those who are dying and to those who are bereaved. A considerable time was spent in honing listening skills and developing an attitude of compassion, presence and willingness to listen to “the hearts “ of those experiencing intense sadness and loss. An afternoon reflecting on the process of dying and the dispelling of myths surrounding this was

illuminating, as well as gaining some valuable insights into the process of “dying well”. The privilege of accompanying a dying person and possibly helping him/her to articulate deep wishes was another challenging and compassionate aspect of listening. Our final session focused on our own preparation for death. Perhaps reflecting on this will help us in our accompanying of others.

This course was underpinned throughout by prayer and reflection on relevant passages of Scripture which have been essential in our Christian understanding of loss, suffering, death and resurrection. As Bishop Séamus has said time and again any new initiatives need to be rooted and grounded in Prayer.

There are many people in our diocese who are visiting the sick and supporting families after significant losses. Perhaps something of what we have explored in this pilot course may encourage these generous people to explore ways of enriching what they already do and of inviting others to embark on a journey of discovery and service. 

Mrs Christian Smith

### Advent 2017: Be Prepared!



The Advent resources are still available. Please contact Karen if you would like to receive a CD of the resources. You will also find them available to download from the diocesan website.

[www.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.rcdhn.org.uk)

### Lent 2018

The resources for Lent, ‘Journeying Together’, will be available on CD from the department, or alternatively to download from the diocesan website early in the New Year.

### Contact Details

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## 'HAPPENS TO US ALL'

What's the opposite of life? The answer is not, as you might expect, death. The opposite of life is fear, including our fear of death.

That's just one of the issues explored in the Ministry of Consolation pilot training I've just had the good fortune to be part of.

Death is a serious business, so let's start with a cartoon joke I saw recently. A man seriously ill in hospital turns to his wife and says: 'My grandfather died, my grandmother died, my uncle died, my father died...It runs in the family'. He's right. Death is the normal end of life, part of our human condition, and we may need help to prepare us for the event. As palliative care expert Kathryn Mannix suggests, just as a midwife helps to prepare our entry into this world, it would be useful to have listeners trained to ease our delivery into the next. Dying people are likely to have issues bigger than medical ones. For example, they may need to forgive

themselves, to forgive others, to be forgiven, to thank people, and to say 'I love you'.

The punchline of the joke makes another serious point. Having heard her husband bewailing his fate, his wife turns to him and snaps, 'It's alright for you. You won't be here to pick up the pieces'. And he won't. So who is going to help her pick up the pieces? Hopefully, family and/or close friends. But that's not always possible. And perhaps that may not be enough, especially as time passes and the activities of the funeral have passed. That's a time when the Ministry of Consolation may have a role to play.

And that's why practitioners and parishioners from throughout the diocese have been taking part in a pilot scheme at St Hilda's to prepare them to accompany dying people and their families, and to support the bereaved. We have participated in thought-deepening spiritual reflections; shared personal histories; looked at society's attitudes to death, and our own; considered particular needs of the

dying and the bereaved; listened to personal testimonies; practiced our listening skills; been advised what not to say; been awed by speakers who have worked in emergency disaster zones, or have been present at the deaths of many; have explored the idea of a 'good death' via discussion and the powerful [artofdyingwell.org](http://artofdyingwell.org) website; and been reassured by the expertise of a palliative care expert who trains MacMillan nurses.

We all feel the responsibility to comfort the dying and console the bereaved, but sometimes our well-intentioned clichés and tissues aren't that helpful. If you feel drawn to this area of ministry, you might do well to consider joining one of the Consolation courses to be offered shortly. Doing the training does not commit you to join a formal support team, but you will at least have deepened your own awareness of the issues around illness, death and bereavement. And that might just make a difference to someone near you. 

Mike Webster, Hogarth Partnership

## Upcoming Events in the Diocese and Local Centres

### St Antony's Priory

**Monday 8th January 7pm** (please note the change of day for afternoon session)

**Thursday 11th January 2.30pm:** Well-Being Sessions "Listening to the Wisdom of our Bodies"

Led by Paul Golightly and Priory Team (weekly thereafter except school holidays).

The Power of Intention, Meditation, Spiritual Practices, Energy and Bodywork are proven in much recent research, to offer great benefits for our wholeness and well-being in the stress of daily life, in coping and dealing with traumatic experiences. For the last three years St Antony's have offered well-being and resilience days to the recovery community and carers.

For more information contact Paul Golightly  
(0)191 384 3747  
[info@stantonypriory.co.uk](mailto:info@stantonypriory.co.uk)

### Minsteracres

**Walking Retreat**  
**21 February 2018,**  
**10.00am - 5.00pm**

Enjoy a walk of seven to ten miles through the beautiful countryside around Minsteracres, with time for prayer, reflection and sharing of the beauty of creation. You will need suitable walking boots and warm, weatherproof clothing. Please bring a packed lunch. The walk will be led by the Minsteracres team.

**Quiet Day of Reflection during Lent**  
**Wednesday 28 February**  
**10.00am - 4.00pm**

An opportunity to step aside during the season of Lent, listen to God in scripture and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the countryside.

For further Information or to book  
please contact Minsteracres Retreat Centre  
01434 673248 | [info@minsteracres.org](mailto:info@minsteracres.org)

### Centre for Prayer and Mission

**Exploring Scripture**  
**Mondays 1.30pm-3.30pm**

For those who wish to go deeper into understanding the Word of God

**Prayer Shawl Ministry**



We meet every **second Thursday of the month** at 1.30pm - 3.30pm to pray together and knit/crochet shawls for sick people, vests and hats for the Fish and Chip Babies, hats for seamen, scarves and mitts for the homeless, pullovers for the street boys in Nairobi and anything else that is needed. Newcomers always welcome.

For further information or to book  
please contact Sr Michael on  
0191 5813249  
[marymichael.lee7@googlemail.com](mailto:marymichael.lee7@googlemail.com)