

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme
4. Covid-19, crisis fatigue – and you

Psychotherapist and priest Peter Wells shares his insight on living long-term with a pandemic

However resilient I consider myself to be, there is always the possibility, often subtly felt and cumulative, that this 'thing' just gets too much to handle. It's too much to think about, too much to live with, just too much. And this is not just for a couple of months, this is a marathon, and I've not been in training for such a marathon. This virus attacks health, my health, however old I might be, whoever I am.

As a human being I require, to a greater or lesser extent, social interaction, and now, because I am spending more time with those I usually live with, I might have too much or, because I am more on my own, too little!!

Why does crisis fatigue occur?

- * I am not in control and I feel confused, baffled and vulnerable a lot of the time
- * The cumulative effect of endless news updates on TV and radio, and a bombardment of comments on social media, texts, emails and phone calls
- * A lot of uncertainty as to exactly what is going on, what is required by me, what can I do, how do I help others
- * There is no space left to think of anything else, or manage anything else, or be interested in anything else
- * How can I not feel under siege, how can I not feel fatigue!

What to look out for

- * I can become distracted or disinterested in other aspects of life
- * Because I don't know what to do or how to respond, I get fearful and express it in anger or go silent. I sulk, I don't want to talk to anyone
- * I might not notice that I'm less interested in eating because I am anxious, or I am over-eating because I'm trying to soothe myself
- * My sleep pattern becomes disturbed
- * If I'm at home so much, either alone or with others, I get bored, I don't know how to express my frustration - except towards others or the cat!

- * I find myself ruminating about what might or might not happen to me, to others, to the world

What can I do?

ACCEPT that this crisis is going to last some time and prepare myself.

A: acknowledge that I am not in control and I need to find ways of coping

C: compromise on what I would like to do and work out what I can do

C: know that there will be **consequences** that are out of my control

E: show **empathy** to others because this shows that I and they are not alone

P: be **passionate** about caring for myself and those around me

T: trust in myself that I am doing all I can

Create a routine

- Prioritise what needs to be done each day
- Plan out my day to give it a structure
- Pace myself so that I don't do everything at once
- Permission to know I can only do so much, and seeking help and support is not weakness

Take a break

We all need time off from the news and worries.

- * Give myself 'news' breaks - I can catch up with the news later
- * Create distractions that I enjoy, such as books, games, tv, radio, films, online games
- * Make sure that I video-link with others so that I can see faces, not just words in a text or voices on the phone
- * Include some meditation, mindfulness, prayer
- * Create an exercise programme that I enjoy, even if simply walking up and downstairs and some stretches or online yoga sessions
- * Set meal and sleep times

And remember ...

- I, and those I am in contact with, are going to have days of sadness and frustration
- I need to be honest about how I feel and not hide or deny it
- I know others will be feeling the same
- I need to be kind to myself, and those around me.

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.

St Luke's thanks Peter Wells for permission to use this article as part of its Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme. You can find out more about Peter here:

www.psychotherapy.org.uk/therapist/peter-wells/