



## Clergy Webinar June 23, 2020

Bishop Goff opened the gathering with prayer and some brief remarks. Of particular note was her guidance on pastoral visits. She indicated that this was a decision to be made prayerfully by each priest, considering their own vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of the person visited and their family and/or caregiver. Often such persons have been isolated for some time. Consider how your visit might pose a risk. If you decide to make such a visit, the following rules apply:

- Wear a mask.
- Keep distant as much as possible.
- Communion is only allowed in an end-of-life situation, one time only. Wear gloves.
- Anointing is permitted, with gloves.
- Keep the visit as brief as possible. The longer the visit, the higher is the risk.
- If the person you are visiting is in a hospital or care facility, please abide by all of that facility's regulations governing pastoral visits.
- If the number of persons in your parish who are in need of such visits exceeds the capacity of the clergy to attend to them, Lay Eucharistic Visitors may be used. This would require some specific training of them, since this will not feel like the usual visits they may have done in the past. Consider which of your Lay Pastoral Visitors are in the lowest category of risk as you plan for LEVs doing this work, consistent with current CDC guidelines.

Bishop Susan then introduced Dr Jessica Young Brown, a Clinical Psychologist and professor of practical theology at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, whose work and writing focuses on the intersection of the Church and mental health. Her topic was self-care for clergy in these difficult times. Her PowerPoint, as well as other reading assignments she gives her students, can be found here:

- [Making Space at the Well, Mental Health and the Church](#) – by Dr. Brown
- [Ministers Cannot Thrive if They Neglect Themselves](#) – Dr. Brown
- [Thinking in Threes](#)
- [The Purpose of Rest](#) – by Chanequa Walker Barnes
- [Self Care Assessment](#)

## Clergy Q&A

What language have you found works well/best to communicate these concepts to our parish? **Certainly the language of stewardship is helpful; you are a resource to your people, and your stewarding of yourself and their stewarding of you should resonate.**

Just a comment: LOVE your opening analogy about stewarding the gift that God has given us....and we have kind of trashed! Yes, body, mind and spirit.....

Thank you, Dr. Brown. One hard thing is the boundaries around working from home - learning not to respond to emails, texts, phone calls when is it after "work" hours....unless it is an emergency. This is a challenge for me....not as much for my parish! **I'm pretty clear about when I am available for non-emergent support and when I am not. It's useful to clearly and lovingly state the boundaries, not as a tool of exclusion, but as a necessary re-charging. Sometimes I'll tell people that I want to give them my best, and if I don't have that Sabbath time, I cannot give them my best - I'm a vessel that has been all poured out. As for texts, I actually have two numbers, one which is private and one which I keep for work. Texts go to the work number. I only respond to them within my own stated boundaries. My private phone does not have my email on it, so I can be fully present to my family at the end of my work day.**

The term "quarantine fatigue" is helpful. Being able to recognize and name something as triggered by quarantine fatigue can help us make more realistic and healthy decisions.**It's true for you AND for your people. Naming it may lead to a helpful conversation about expectations.**

And what language do you encourage us to use with our vestries, and our managing their expectations of us? **This becomes an opportunity to appropriately delegate and share the responsibilities. Everyone has gifts, but as St Paul told us, different people have different gifts. You do not need to be the bearer of all the gifts. Discern who is spiritually gifted to help in different areas and encourage them to live into their gifts, rather than simply taking it all on yourself.**

What systemic mechanism / processes do you recommend for a parish or diocese to help support, enforce, encourage, develop these spiritual disciplines?  
**Your task is to teach. Start with your leadership team. Model what you want them to learn in your own manner of leadership.**

Are there strategies beyond getting a therapist that you can recommend for handling the emotional weight of these times. Some of us may be angry that statues ("history") is being torn apart. Others may be angry that racism remains. Still others are upset that we can't get back into the church property. And parishioners tend to want to "dump" their emotional anxiety on us which compounds our own. What's a priest to do?  
**It's always good to remember that God is God and you are not God. Your worth as a priest is not measured by how well you assuage all the concerns of your parishioners. Your task is to remind them that everyone is tired and that expresses itself in different**

ways – impatience, even anger, grief, self-isolation, depression – but that God is with them, and they have the capacity to take their pain to God in prayer. It is reasonable to say “I can’t fix all that ails you, but I know that God is walking with you, and all of us in this.”

I am experiencing something that is not new but is frustrating and troubling. Through the church grapevine I have learned that "People" are unhappy with me the rector because of [fill in the blank]. Yet they tell someone else "in confidence" and don't want me to know - thus triangulating. How do I engage unhappy parishioners from whom I am physically isolated and who won't talk to me? Right now some of this is connected to our political climate and around racial justice. I cannot listen and respond if people won't connect. Thoughts? Help! **It may well be that you can make an educated guess as to which parishioners are unhappy. Reach out with a phone call just to check in and see what happens.**

Will this recording be available to share? I think it would be really valuable to our lay staff too. **We do not share these recordings, but you raise an interesting point in terms of the needs of lay staff. We'll think about how we can support them directly, as we have in the past with particular trainings.**