



For
now

– *being the church
in unusual times*

For now – caring for one another

Just now: All needy. All needed

We are used to pastoral care in a congregation being offered to those who have experienced a particular life crisis – bereavement, illness, loss, grief. Often pastoral care is given by the minister, elder, another staff member or specially trained group in the congregation.

Suddenly all of us find ourselves in need of care because the Covid-19 pandemic affects us all in different ways. It's now too big a task to be left to a few. All of us are both needy and needed to care for one another.

Watch: a short introduction to this session by clicking [here](#)

Read: Galatians 6:1-10 [Click here](#) for the passage

Talk about: *Carrying one another's burdens*

These verses have a lot to teach us about what it looks and feels like to look out for one another in our church life with watchfulness, gentleness and patience.

1. These verses picture the church as family (verses 1 and 10). During Covid-19 we have had to find different ways of keeping in touch with and caring for our physical family members. In what ways might they help shape how we look after one another in church life in present circumstances?
2. Verse 2 calls us to 'carry each other's burdens'. What burdens are different groups in your congregation shouldering just now because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – children, young people, families, singles, elderly, the isolated, those working overseas, others? In what simple ways might we lighten their load?
3. It is easy for us to become judgmental just now about the way others are responding to the very real challenges of everyday life and involvement in church activity. This passage warns us to beware of that attitude (verses 1, 3-4) as we seek to help and restore others. How can we better find out the circumstances and challenges others are facing and so be better equipped to gently encourage them in these days?
4. Caring for others usually involves long, hard work. It is easy to start, but harder to maintain. How can we ensure we don't become 'weary in doing good' (v9) as we care for one another?

Consider: *Ways of keeping in touch to care for one another*

Perhaps we can frame our care for one another around a few simple ways of keeping in touch. Used as appropriate, these might help our congregation care for a variety of members in as comprehensive a way as possible while navigating ongoing restrictions.

- **Text** – personal, short and simple, but prayerfully sent, may be the right thing at just the right time.
- **Telephone call** – personal, longer encounter, offering the opportunity to speak, listen and pray. Helpful in allowing someone to hear a familiar voice.
- **Zoom call** – personal and fuller connection, offering the opportunity to speak, listen and pray. Helpful in allowing someone to see a familiar face.
- **House call** – personal and in-person, offering the opportunity to speak, listen and pray. Offers the often underrated gift of just being present with someone else. Always to be undertaken with appropriate care and only as current restrictions allow.
- **Small group follow up (digital or in-person)** – Personal but wider contact, offering the opportunity for extending conversation, support, learning and praying together.
- **Group letter, email or WhatsApp** – communal and helpful in reminding everyone in a group or church organisation that we are encountering the challenges of Covid-19 pandemic together.

Try: *Tips for a caring conversation*

- **Starting the conversation** – Begin by asking, ‘what is life like for you at the moment?’ Listen not just for the response, but for the tone and tenor of how it is being said. Sometimes that reveals so much more.
- **Leaving space to listen** – You may be the only person this person will speak to that day, maybe even that week. Resist the temptation to do all the talking or take control of the conversation.
- **Identifying need by asking sensitive questions** – ‘In what ways are you finding it difficult to do what needs to be done during this period of restrictions’ is a softer, more open way in to identifying needs than, ‘how can I help you?’
- **Changing the conversation** – There is a lot of doom and gloom circling at the minute. Many people are anxious and others suffer from mental health issues that make life doubly tough at a time like this. If the conversation is becoming negative in tone, take the opportunity to sensitively move it onto more positive hopeful ground.
- **Sharing Scripture and prayer** – Think about a few simple verses from the Bible you can offer to read. Nothing too long. Something on which you can make a short comment. Ask what in particular you can pray for them. Then pray. Keep it short, simple and tailored to what you know of where this person is on their journey of faith – still searching, new believer, long-time follower of Jesus.

Pray: About what God is leading your congregation to do for now in caring for one another.

Follow up?

For frameworks for using the Bible in pastoral care, see this resource available for free download on the PCI website www.presbyterianireland.org/pastoralvisitingcards

