

## Practical and Pastoral Response to Death and Dying

### Getting ready for the life-changing event that we call 'death'

Supporting people in 'being ready' for their end of life, and the practicalities such as making a Will, creating a funeral service plan and considering a payment plan for their own funeral with a local funeral director, can be very helpful for some people, especially if there are those without family or close friends to give support in this way.

Our team has created a resource called 'Journeying Home' which creates a safe space for group and individual conversations around death and dying, wishes and thoughts about life and death. This is a creative resource and those who have participated in Journeying Home sessions affirm the joy found in the session, but also the meaningful way in which the topic is considered. (See the 'Resources to support you' section for more details.)

For those leading funerals you may find the Leading Funerals booklet helpful. It has been compiled by recommendations from a group of both newly appointed and long-serving Salvation Army officers. Journeying with people at the end of life is a privilege but can also be stressful, so we hope that these gentle suggestions will help you when your time comes to help those who are 'journeying home' and their loved ones. Visit [www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/journeying-home](http://www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/journeying-home) to find out more.

Leaders also may want to consider preaching on death and dying to begin open discussions around the topic and breaking what is often considered a taboo on this subject.



### Supporting those living through the life-changing event we call 'death'

None of us will experience the same death, as we are all individuals. However, what is a common thread is often the need for someone to 'travel' towards the end of life with another.

Penelope Wilcock in her book *Spiritual Care of Dying and Bereaved People* says:

*'When we are with people approaching death, we feel a sense of awe, the solemnity of a great and sacred moment approaching. To accompany other people, along with their loved ones, up to the gate of death, is to enter holy ground; to stand in an awesome place where the wind of the Spirit blows, to encounter peace and grief, insight, intimacy and pain on a level not found in ordinary living.'*

## Supporting those living through the life-changing event we call 'death'

Support will be needed by the person who is dying, but also their family, friends and loved ones. Death is rarely about one person, as others known to the person who dies will experience grief as a result.

We can never say that we fully 'understand' how another feels, but as Penelope Wilcock states, the 'accompanying' of another person on this journey is where we find the need for a pastoral heart and a care that simply bears with the souls who are grieving. If you are a pastoral carer, please be aware of your own wellbeing and please seek help yourself if you need to do so. Pastoral care of the one dying may involve sharing Scripture, prayer, stories of joy, time of confession and 'putting things right'.



Consider what would be helpful for the family and friends of the one who is dying, always remembering that the realisation of the loss of a loved one will be different for everyone.

Would they find it helpful for you to take them out of the home / hospital / hospice / care home setting? Can you offer practical support such as creating a rota to provide meals or transportation for hospital visits?

Considering the practical rituals of saying goodbye will be different for every family/friendship group, so be prepared for those who might want to sit by the bedside for hours. Some may wish for music to be played or watch TV together, others may find it too difficult to be with their loved one for long periods of time. There may be moments when sadly there is a denial of death from both the person dying and their loved ones.

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We acknowledge that there will be some people who have no family or friends to 'walk with them to the gates of death', and in these circumstances you may be the only person they have in their final moments. This is the ministry of simply 'being present'.

You may wish to use simple readings like Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer. For when you are unable to be physically present, you could consider creating a CD/playlist of traditional, gentle songs or their favourite music. Christian audio books or Bible apps where Scripture is read out loud can encourage the soul with the Spirit of God.

## Supporting those affected by a sudden and unexpected death

In a situation when there has been an unexpected death, this can be very traumatic for family and friends. Be aware of feelings of shock, grief, denial and anger at their loved one dying suddenly. The emotions of the ones left behind to deal with their own grief can be raw and complex. The recognition that everyone deals with grief differently and in their own time is a challenge for the pastoral carer. Your own response should not negate the full extent of another's feelings or what circumstances are surrounding those feelings.

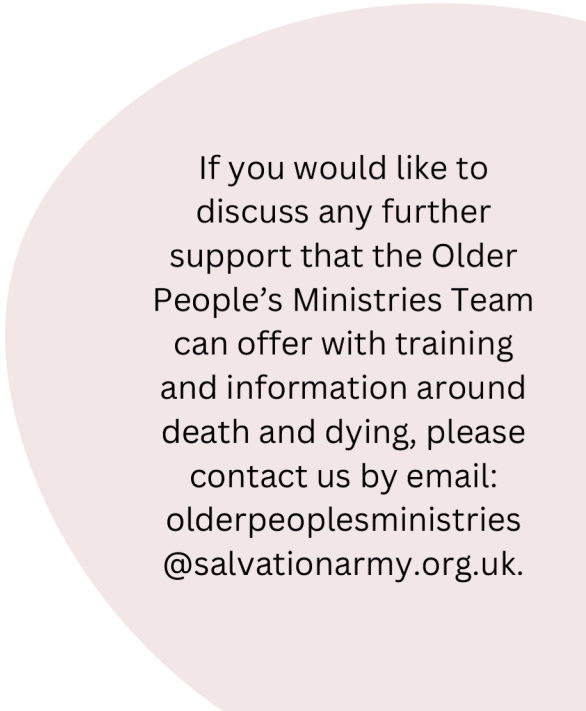

Pastoral care for the whole family is paramount. Therefore, consider reaching out to the wider church family for practical and pastoral support. No act of kindness is too small when a traumatic experience happens.

## Supporting those after death and beyond

Pastoral care does not stop a day or a week after the funeral. The grief and loss people will be experiencing after a death of a loved one could potentially last a lifetime in some form. We must remember that grief continues and changes the shape of the world for those who are bereaved. Using a phrase such as 'time is a healer' is not helpful to anyone who has lost their spouse / life partner, parent, child, relative or friend.

To acknowledge that death is difficult for those left behind is the most sensitive act of a pastoral carer. You could use a calendar to remember the date of someone who has died so that anniversaries and birthdays are acknowledged, perhaps just with a card, text / phone call, to show support and understanding of the pain of ongoing grief. The remembering of a loved one, sharing stories, talking about them can be very helpful in the healing process, so let us not be afraid to speak of the one who has died.

We acknowledge that the pastoral care of those within our corps/churches/communities requires everyone to take an active part. However, we also acknowledge that for many leaders the pastoral care of preparing people for end of life and also dealing with those who are dying and the bereaved is a responsibility that is carried very much alone. Therefore we hope that the resources we recommend will help you to create a community of people who are much more willing to talk about death and dying. You may even consider becoming a Bereavement Friendly Church with the help and resources of the organisation Loss and Hope.



If you would like to discuss any further support that the Older People's Ministries Team can offer with training and information around death and dying, please contact us by email: [olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk).