

Newsletter



Renewing the Gospel's call to heal the sick by supporting Anglicans working across the world in health care, whether in clinical settings or in the community.



Across the Communion, clergy and medical practitioners along with survey data all report increasing levels of mental ill-health in our communities and among our caring professions. Reflecting Jesus' ministry in restoring health and wholeness, what can we do to support mental and spiritual well-being, help with grief and trauma care, promote resilience, and care for the carers?

Dr Janice Tsang offers a **Bible Study** that explores human contact, mental distress and reaching out to those in need in one of November's Gospel readings – the story of Jesus and the little children (Luke 18:15-17).

As we face high levels of stress in our churches and in parish ministry, Bishop Murray Harvey shares his **reflections and questions** about changing vocations and demands.

Finally, Ruth Rice, Director of *Renew Wellbeing*, offers an **example in practice** of how churches can partner with mental health services setting up quiet, shared spaces for encouraging wellbeing.

We are endeavouring to ensure that as many of our network members have access to our newsletter content as possible. Therefore, as soon as we are able, we will also be releasing translated versions of this newsletter in **French, Portuguese and Spanish**. Following that, our next step is to make this a consistent offer with future newsletters, as we continue to develop the network. Should you wish to subscribe to a translated version of this newsletter, [please click here](#).

The Little Children and Jesus - As Pure As A Child, and Care for Our Little Child...

Jesus called the children to Him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18: 16)

One of the Gospel Readings for November according to the Lectionary is taken from Luke 18: 15-17 with Jesus explicitly stating in a gentle yet affirmative manner that only those who are child-like could receive the Kingdom of God and that all little children are welcomed to Him and His Kingdom.

While historically and culturally all Jewish families placed great value on having children, yet in their traditional patriarchal system, women and children did not have the same or equal opportunities as men. And part of the social norms being, even among the rabbis, they only had time for the best students, rather than the less outstanding ones. Perhaps, it was in the context in the Gospel reading that the disciples of Jesus were trying to protect Jesus from "wasting time" with the young children, and to uphold Jesus' social image at that time in the community that he was a great teacher dedicated for the strong and the smart adults. However, Jesus specially gave blessings to the little children and taught the crowds that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18:17), and similar narrative of this teaching was also documented in the books of Matthew (19: 13-15) and Mark (10: 13-16).

While in the midst of all the uncertainties around the world, from the never anticipated global pandemics, the unanticipated prolonged social distancing and face-to-face interactions over the last few years, the relatively lack of human touch has indeed led to much psychological and mental distress across all ages across the continents and no one is immune to this extra pandemic of "psychosocial distress" or "mental disturbance". Yet from a mental health and clinical pastoral care point of view, and quoting Eric Berne who was a Canadian-born psychiatrist and the founder of the "transactional analysis theory", leading to the "parent-adult-child (PAC) model", and it was proposed that many a times, the observed "dysfunctional behaviour" among those who are mentally distressed is usually the result of self-limiting decisions made in childhood in the interest of survival, leading to the "life script". By being aware of the "unconscious life script" of oneself and better self-awareness, this could lead to better self-acceptance and self-compassion for oneself with better understanding of our negative life events or emotions from our childhood or our past.

Here from Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Luke, on one hand, Jesus is telling us to be as pure as a child as we go along our life journey, with congruent expression of our feelings and emotions as well as having the full trust in Him like a little child having full trust in his or her parent or grannies. It is this believing is seeing rather than seeing is believing that brings a child closer to God.

On the other hand, it also talks about caring about our own "little child", for each one of us have had our childhood, and we were all once a little child, be it a happy one or a difficult one, and it is the self-awareness and listening to our own unmet needs, to be mindful about freeing our unconscious "adapted child mode" to a "free child mode" so that our "little child" could be liberated with His unconditional love, full of faith and hope, being creative and joyful at all times. For Jesus teaches us, "Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31). Only when we have better understanding of ourselves and our unmet needs can we as His clinical pastoral workers, be able to serve our neighbour and the underprivileged, especially those who are under distress in times of challenge, especially those with psychological or mental distress.

So as part of the Anglican Community, are we ready to care about our "little child", and are we ready to be an active listener and reach out to those who are in need, welcoming the weak and the little children and be as pure as children and as faithful as children towards the unfailing hope of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**Dr. Janice Tsang MBBS, MRCP (UK), FRCP(Lond.), FRCP (Edin.), FHKCP, FHKAM(Medicine)
Specialist in Medical Oncology, Co-Convenor of the AHCN**

Reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic and the dynamic nature of vocation

As a Diocesan Bishop in Australia, I have been concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of clergy since the start of the pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, research showed that levels of anxiety, stress and depression amongst clergy were already of concern. Research that was conducted in many Australian Anglican dioceses during the pandemic showed alarming levels of stress, anxiety and depression. On the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) about 63% of clergy and church leaders reported experiencing normal levels of stress compared to 87% prior to the pandemic. A similar picture was seen for depression and anxiety compared to what had been reported in the earlier study that was conducted prior to the pandemic, indicating that reported levels on all three measures rose significantly during this time.

As well as being a bishop I am a Registered Psychologist and am involved in the teaching of psychology at university level. I know that research into mental health, including clergy mental health specifically, has shown similar results in many countries. We recently held a joint seminar with faculty members of the Clergy Health Initiative of Duke University in the United States. Their research amongst US clergy has revealed high levels of anxiety amongst clergy over the impact of the pandemic on church attendance, church finances and the increased time and skill required to produce online worship options.

Prior to the pandemic most of my academic research and writing has been in the field of vocation to the Ordained Ministry. A sense of call or vocation is not static, but dynamic, so it is affected by changing demands and expectations such as those that COVID-19 has placed on ministers in parish and other settings. COVID-19 has prompted many people in ministry, especially full time paid ministry, to ask themselves the question: what is God asking of me in this new landscape? Do I have the gifts and skills necessary to authentically serve God through parish ministry now? Our Australian statistics reveal significantly reduced levels of life satisfaction, personal wellbeing and perceived effectiveness amongst clergy now compared to pre-pandemic levels. Taken together, these may lead some to leave ministry.

The Community Health Network and its Mental Health Community of Practice has been an incredibly valuable forum to begin to explore these questions from a global perspective.

[Click here for an abstract of a paper](#) by Dr Harvey on vocation.

**Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton, Australia**

Renew Wellbeing: Quiet shared spaces where it's Ok not to be Ok

The World Health Organisation are asking us to "Make mental health and wellbeing for all a global priority"^[1]. I am so glad and it fills me with hope. As someone who has struggled with my own mental and emotional health I believe that now is the time for the church, any church, every church to join this vision.

Several years ago to help attend to my own wellbeing following a breakdown we set up a little cafe style space attached to a prayer area where we also partnered with mental health services to provide a simple quiet shared space for hobbies and activities and inclusive rhythms of optional prayer for all.

Not only did this help my wellbeing it helped many others. Today more than 200 churches have set up similar spaces. We offer training and support to any church to set up a place to be present, be prayerful and be in partnership: a Renew space where all are equal and wellbeing is the shared language.

One lady who attends our first ever Renew space said "I love this space: Now someone knows my name."

We can be the people of God's shalom at the very heart of renewing wellbeing. Will you join us?

Free training: www.renewwellbeing.org.uk
Read "Slow Down, Show Up and Pray" by Ruth Rice for the story and the manual to set up your space. From amazon, any bookshop or [St Andrews Bookshop](#).

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[1] www.who.int
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Resources

Spiritual resources

The Anglican Alliance has also produced a series of bible studies and reflections called [Faith in the Time of Coronavirus](#). These help us to place our experience of the pandemic in the context of our faith and include bible studies on issues such as calming fears and building hope, which can help strengthen our mental well-being. The bible studies can be used in the household and also in gathering with others online.

COVID-19 and mental health: looking after ourselves and others.

In these pages we share some top tips to help people care for themselves, the people they are with and others in the wider community during these challenging times. We also [provide links to resources](#) that we have found especially helpful, which can be adapted to different contexts.