



## *Dennis Wight, immediate past Archdeacon of St Davids, considers the impact of Covid-19 on ministers*

In a recent mini-survey of some clergy in the diocese, one person said that conducting a funeral amid the pandemic has been heart-breaking, as restrictions have meant only 10 people could attend. One said, "I have never experienced anything like it", and another, "we were desperate to comfort one another and couldn't, standing 2m apart."

The work of a minister is always emotionally challenging and the task of preparing a family for a funeral does not begin at the graveyard or crematorium. Having no face-to-face contact with the bereaved was particularly taxing. One respondent found it difficult having to constantly remember to allow for silence and not to say "are you still there?", when it felt as though there was nothing happening at the other end. It was so much more difficult to confirm information without sounding like officialdom. Then, once off the phone, the feeling of exhaustion and the longing for the presence of tears, not just their sound.

Zoom was even more gruelling, "after a couple of those in one day I was drained" said one. Holding eye contact with the camera so that the person could see you looking at them at all times was the only way to focus in the moment, so that deep things could be shared.

Then, at the graveside after greeting folks, one would need to gently state instructions like "Instead of shaking hands, hugging and embracing, we have to keep our distance, let's use our eyes and faces to comfort each other."

"Sara (not her real name), the wife of the deceased, approached me in her wheelchair, someone spoke from a distance, I turned and before I knew it she was upon me clutching my hand and telling me all about her man. She was affected by dementia and once she was holding my hand there was no chance of escape! The safe distancing breached, all I could do was console her and, once apart, I reached for the sanitiser in my pocket, first giving her some and then me." Being caught off guard has left feelings of failure and even fear of infection and the onward spread of coronavirus.

Ministers have practised pastoral care and liturgy with faithfulness and imagination but, in supporting the bereaved, there has been a psychological cost. They, too, are experiencing the toll Covid-19 is taking on mental health and wellbeing, and they will need understanding looks and virtual hugs.