

Pastoral Care

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Scribe -- Dicky Allison, Church of the Messiah, Woods Hole

All the parishes represented at this table agreed that communication is key.

Other comments included the need for more lay leadership. Each parish really needs someone to spearhead the communication efforts or the establishment of a method to connect with each parishioner. Hilary is the Pastoral Care Coordinator for St. Mary's.

St. Mary's has or has had:

Open Circles == Pastoral care by neighborhood. There is a huge map on the wall with parishioners locations.

Services at 8am and 10am on Sundays and 5pm on Saturdays and the congregations tend to know who comes to the particular service and if there are extended absences, someone checks up on those people.

A "parish nurse". This was someone who was a nurse by profession and was a resource for questions about parishioner safety particularly.

A "watch list" group that met monthly and would be responsible for newsletter articles about tick borne diseases or forums in Lent with such subjects as 'Loneliness' or other issues of interest to seniors.

Almost all parishes have some form of attendance monitoring at services. If someone usually comes and hasn't for awhile, people check. This 'checking' also may extend to providing something for someone in need, again by word of mouth mainly.

The question then came up about people who aren't fully connected but occasional members of the congregation. How do we track those people and find those who may be in need? Are there neighborhood informal gatherings?

The gatherings are occasional and informal at St. Peter's on the Canal.

Church of the Messiah has no neighborhood gatherings mostly because Woods Hole is one neighborhood and the parishioners who don't live in Woods Hole are not clustered in any way.

A prayer chain or a prayer list is another way parishes keep track of needs or concerns. One person or group of people is in charge of the prayer list and others communicate with that person when someone they know is sick or in need.

Who leads the prayer chain? Sometimes clergy, sometimes lay leaders.

How many people are in the prayer chain? It varies.

How do the people in the prayer chain communicate? Email, mostly.

How long do people stay remembered on the prayer chain? This can be problematic. Unless the date the person is added is tracked, there is no way to know how long a person might be on it. Also, if a person dies and the prayer chain is not informed, they remain on the list.

In Christ Church, Harwichport, the name and the person who entered the name are recorded.

Sometimes there is a form, like at St. Peter's. Who you want to add and who you are. It is not the only way to get the name in however and keeping the names up-to-date is still a problem.

Some parishes have a two week or month limit.

Sometimes the prayer list is in the newsletter or the bulletin.

The LEVs and LEMs also have a role in pastoral care. Homebound people sometimes want communion and sometimes don't. Sometimes they want a visit by a clergy person and sometimes they just want a visit.

Pastoral care also takes place in hospitals, nursing homes and rehab facilities. And it matters. People remember if the visiting care-giver is perfunctory or engaged.

Pastoral care can be a way into or out of the church. People remember for years the kind of caring they received.

Many of us at the table shared stories of pastoral care received. It makes an impression.

The consensus at the table is that, unless a program like that at St. Mary's exists, mostly pastoral care is by word of mouth. Email or phone calls.

Surprisingly, there is an education component in Pastoral care. People need to understand what it is and that it is NOT painful. Pastoral care givers need to be sensitive to people who don't want to talk about their own situations.

There are other ways to get to know people who come to church besides in the pews.

There is or was a men's lunch group at both St. Peter's and Church of the Holy Spirit.

St. Mary's has had a Tuesday men's Eucharist and book discussion.

Other parishes have book discussions.

Bible study is often pastoral care in disguise. Engagement is the key.

The Prayer Shawl ministry at St. Barnabas and elsewhere is another way to do Pastoral care. You can keep track of people and feel connected at the same time.