

CMD

Attending to your own self-care

Why self-care (and mutual care) is a key part of the Continuing Ministerial Development Framework. By Tim Fergusson

If you are a minister – whether a church pastor, chaplain, pioneer, evangelist, or children’s, youth or families’ worker – how are you doing? One year on from the upending of your established pattern of ministry, how’s it going?

It has become common place to play down any difficulties we have endured or weariness we carry, because we feel there are others more worthy of sympathy. Probably few ministers wish to focus on their own trials when so many frontline workers continue to risk their own health, day in, day out.

But counting up the cost of change and loss shouldn’t be a competitive activity. Yes, of course most of us can identify easily those who have fared worse during the pandemic. Nevertheless, we still have to face the reality of our own circumstances. Recent conversations with ministers have made it clear that the picture is extremely mixed. Some have even thrived through this last year, but the majority report at least a sense of weariness. It is not hard to see why. Various, ministers have had to navigate the following:

An increased pastoral burden without the use of that most basic tool – pastoral visiting. A constantly changing landscape of guidance and requirements. Worries about the wisdom and even the legality of different types of gathering. Conflict with those who feel decisions have been too cautious or too cavalier. A compromised ability to offer care leading up to and following so many deaths. Concern over children, young people and the elderly in the absence of their usual support activities. The requirement to learn new skills in a short time. Anxiety about church finances and the sustainability of paid ministry. Pressure to reimagine the church beyond the pandemic, even as the pandemic itself rages on. The absence of the joy of festivals celebrated together or the chance to relax away on holiday... the list might continue. And all this is compounded for some ministers by their own personal experience of illness, clinical vulnerability (what a cold phrase!), bereavement, or the inequality that the pandemic has laid bare, such as for people of colour.

Half-way between the start of the pandemic and today, we launched the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) framework. There was a little unease among some ministers that at the very moment they really started to feel the strain of the pandemic, an additional burden was being placed upon them. However, I cannot emphasise enough one short sentence on the opening page of the CMD handbook. Rightly understood, ‘**CMD is an act of self-care and of mutual care**’. While CMD expects us to grow in learning and skills and to review our ministry from time to time, it also asks us to pay attention to our own well-being, and that of each other.

And right now, clearly, it is this second of the five CMD habits – attentiveness – that must be to the fore. As I asked at the beginning, how are you doing? By which I mean, how are *you* doing? Not, how is your church or chaplaincy or mission project, but how are *you*?

If we are concerned for our self-care, we will be attentive to our rest; to our exercise; to our diet; our quiet; our time off; to our pace.

We may have sacrificed care for ourselves through much of the last year, and this is understandable. But if we are to help our congregations and communities recover well, our own recovery must be included in our priorities.

In our CMD webinar on 17 Marchⁱ, Simon Barrington from Forge Leadership talked of seven priorities for this season of recovery. We should, he said:

1. Acknowledge our own fragility.

We recognise we are far from immune from the deprivations of the pandemic. There should be no shame in admitting that we ourselves may need help.

2. Lean into our own support networks.

This is not the moment for heroic solo endurance. Instead we ask for trusted friends, peers, mentors or regional teams to listen to us and support us.

3. Continue to examine the rhythms of life that refresh us.

As restrictions are lifted, our pattern of ministry will change (yet again!) and we should ensure our pattern of refreshment and rest also develops. The demands upon us will remain high for some time to come, so also should our diligence in seeking rhythms that sustain us.

4. Lean into the 'sacrament of the present moment'.

We remember that God's grace is sufficient for *this* day. Even if we have one eye on future plans for our ministry setting, we pay attention to God's presence here with us in this moment.

5. Push into a new emotional language.

We have all had an encounter with mortality and witnessed global grief. We should make space for lament at all that has been lost and to express our disappointment over all that was planned that could not happen.

6. Accept ongoing uncertainty.

We have shared an experience of losing control of our immediate environment and diary. Unfortunately, certainty probably isn't returning any time soon. So we will have to get used to managing the tension between various polarities – such as the progress of our communities and their well-being, or the provision of online and offline gatherings.

7. Keep focussed on purpose and vision.

Knowing the big picture we are each called to can help ground us in times of transition when we are not sure what the detail of the next few months looks like.

Please watch the webinar if you want to delve more deeply into these ideas. And as the second point makes explicit, much of this is wisely done in conjunction with others. I said above that CMD is an act not only of self-care, but of mutual care. We walk with each other, with good grace and with kindness, as we continue to grapple with the changed nature of our ministry.

Sometimes however, we may benefit from more specialist help than can be provided by peers and mentors. CMCS, the Churches Ministerial Counselling Service, provides professional and subsidised counselling for ministers, ministers' spouses and adult members of their households who wish to access it. You may

access it directly through their websiteⁱⁱ. Your use of the service is never made known to anyone in either the regional associations or among Baptist Union staff. A little over 100 Baptist ministers or their family members began counselling through CMCS in 2020, an increase of 10 per cent over the previous year. Do take advantage of this service if you think it may help you. Asking for support when it is required is simply another example of the self-care we must all pay special attention to in this season. Here are some comments from those who have received counselling through CMCS:

"In ministry it is really important to get help at an early stage – it can be a lonely calling and the pandemic has heightened this."

"I needed 'help' – hard to admit – but at no time [during counselling] did I feel less than valued and supported."

"Sessions via Zoom were helpful as it was not possible to continue face-to-face sessions."

"It was all set up quickly and efficiently but with genuine care... It has made a huge difference at a time I really needed it."

"It was easy to access and fast to get counselling with someone who had some understanding of church life."

"Talking therapies at an affordable cost are vital when no-one else seems able to understand."

"I felt confident in the confidentiality of the service."

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For more on Continuing Ministerial Development, visit baptist.org.uk/cmd

ⁱ <https://youtu.be/KRytCdEzG04>

ⁱⁱ www.cmincs.net/welcome.htm