

Ministry in Daily Life

St. John's is blessed to have many community leaders in our congregation. One of these is Dr. Gary McFarland. Gary is a pastoral deacon and serves as Executive Director of Counseling Center at Charlotte. As Senior Minister, one of my core callings is to equip the people of God to live as Christ's Church in the world by being Ministers in Daily Life. During these months of pandemic and physical distancing, I am asking Gary and others to offer helpful thoughts to equip us as we seek to be better Ministers in Daily Life.

In This Together

Rev. Dr. Gary McFarland, LMFT, LPCS, CFBPPC



Regardless of the particular news venue chosen, we are all guaranteed to hear about COVID-19 daily. With staple supplies running low, gathering places closed, working from home, and social distancing, we have to adapt to a profound new normal. Adapting is seldom as easy as we would hope. You may have friends or family members who are not handling all these changes so well. Or you may be having more difficulty with them than you expected. It is no surprise that during times of upheaval folks experience more anxiety and depression than usual. None of us, I think, really enjoys feeling helpless. We may enjoy the temporary scare of a rollercoaster, but we have a good idea of how it will go. Not so with this pandemic.

Depression can be experienced as several symptoms, with varying intensity. It can also be due to our genetic makeup, our chemistry, or our reaction to a situation. The current situation provides all that is needed for many persons to feel some symptoms of depression. You may feel sad, lethargic, have little interest in things, seem more irritable, be moody, agitated, have sleep difficulties, want to eat more or less than your usual, be tearful, or find it hard to concentrate on things. Some persons who are experiencing a profound depression may have thoughts of self-harm. Folks may be anxious or more easily startled at times. Even if you are one of those who are usually very "solid" in the face of change, you might be more jumpy or distractible now. Even though it doesn't look like any of this will change quickly, things will change. And there will remain, for a time at least, some sense of helplessness as we all have to do things in ways that do not seem normal.

In the meantime there are some things that we each can do that will help us get through this, and help your anxiety and depression. (continued on next page)

- Remember that it is normal to feel more anxious and depressed when faced with the unknown, or when we don't know how best to respond to a situation. Don't suffer in silence. Let family and friends know how you're feeling. (It may go without saying, but parents, share your fears with your spouse or other adult friends. Our kids, especially the younger ones, need us to provide as solid a framework as we can in unsteady times. Don't lie to them, but offer calm reassurance as best you can.)
- Most of us are more comfortable in the light than in the dark. So, get educated. Learn as much as you can, from verified sources, about COVID-19, and how you can protect yourself and others. (I say verified since anyone can put anything online it seems. Know your source!)
- Keep the information stream balanced. Take a break from "breaking news" and read a book or magazine, watch a movie, pull out a board game, work in the yard or do other exercise. Start that novel or poem you've been thinking about. Listen to some music. Have a conversation that doesn't revolve around COVID-19.
- When you learn of steps you can take to be safe, do them. In the face of helplessness, knowing you are doing something that can help, even if it seems a small thing, can be powerful.
- Use all the resources of your faith. While many faith groups are not gathering at traditional times and places of worship, many are making resources available online. And we each have personal resources that come from our personal history, our prior experience of the Creator in our lives. Don't neglect your prayer life. Remember that your faith, and that which you worship, is available 24/7, though your regular worship schedule is disrupted.
- Stay in touch with loved ones and friends. As much good as it can do to hear a loved one's voice, it is even better usually to be able to see them. Face time, Skype, Duo, and Zoom can be wonderful tools these days.
- If you have depressive feelings and anxiety that seem to just hang on, get in touch with your doctor or therapist.

In these days of social distancing, remember that we are truly all in this together. Our actions impact not only ourselves but others. Remember too, that God is with all of us in this as well.