

# COMFORT

## Reaching out in pain and grief

- The service outline below is a guide, which you can adapt in any way you wish.
- **The sections in dark blue comprise an outline lasting about 10 minutes. Sections in light green can be added for a longer version.**
- Introductions to each section may be spoken by the leader or by different members of the group.
- Please feel free to adapt them so that they are natural to what you would say.
- Text in *italics* represent instructional text for you, all other text are the words to be spoken.
- The participants' version is a separate document. You are welcome to print it off and give each person a copy, and/or use the PowerPoint slides if you have projection facilities.
- Participants will be most helped if your words **are spoken slowly**.
- **Don't forget to review how it went afterwards.** Take five minutes to ask: what went well? What could we do better next time? Do this on your own or with others who help you.

### Coming together for comfort

**Welcome people by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.**

- A** Welcome to Soulspace. We are gathering at a time of sadness...(Name it if you would like to.)  
We shall be opening our hearts to each other and to the sources of comfort in the universe.

**OR**

- B** Welcome. In this session we shall be looking at how and where we experience comfort. Please feel free to take part in whatever way feels natural to you. You can talk, or not talk; share, or not share. Use this time to relax and explore.

**OR**

- C** Welcome. You are here among friends. There are no VIPs or special guests. Jesus opens the door to everyone, whether they are joyful or sad, whether they are healthy or in pain, whether they have received life's riches or have experienced a loss, whether they are hopeful or in despair. Whatever our mood, God enfolds us in arms of love. We are here to receive God's comfort and the comfort of one another.

**OR**

- D** Your own words.

**Encourage people to connect. Here are three examples, which you can accompany with a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists').**

**Option 1 Adapt one of the following or make up your own.**

- A** Take a silent moment to notice how you feel. Recognise any feelings of sadness, loss, anger, pain or any other uncomfortable emotion. What has brought about these feelings? Stay with them for a while. Sometimes it is good to be aware of how we feel; we can then let it go, at least for a while.

**OR**

- B** Soften your gaze and run a scan through your body. Start with your head. Notice any feelings of emotional or physical discomfort. What adjustments can you make to feel more comfortable? Continue down your body, noticing and adjusting as you go. Move and sit in a different position, if need to. Try to let any tension or discomfort go, if only for this session.

**OR**

- C** A poet in the Christian Bible wrote: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18) Take a silent moment to notice how you feel – sadness, or loss, or anger, or pain, or any other uncomfortable emotion. Look around the group, and in your thoughts reach out to those who may be feeling the same. Remember: the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and the crushed in spirit.

**OR**

- D** *Your own words.*

**Option 2 Light a candle. As you or another person does so, adapt one of the following or make up your own.**

- A** Love is like a flame that lights up even the darkest of days. Each of us carries a light within us. But maybe right now the flame feels low. You feel sad, empty perhaps, alone possibly, maybe you are burdened by the sufferings of someone close to you, or you are weary because of your physical discomfort and soreness. You long for your flame to flicker more brightly. Instead, you are surrounded by gloom. Stay silently with those feelings. And welcome them as an appropriate response to what you have seen or experienced.

**OR**

- B** The candle gives us light in the dark and comfort from the cold. As we focus on its flame, may we allow the light and the comfort it gives to fill us up. Think about what else gives you comfort, and spend a few moments focusing on these things. Allow feelings of comfort to spread through you.

**OR**

- C** In the Christian Bible, a spiritual leader said: "The thought of my affliction...is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases." (Lamentations 3:19-23) We light our candle as a reminder that God's love shines in the darkness. Ponder silently any feelings that are pulling you down. Let the candle comfort you. God's love never ceases.

**OR**

- D** *Your own words.*

**Option 3** *Provide some blank post cards or similar-sized pieces of paper, and pencils/pens.*

- A** In front of you are some things you can write or draw with. If you'd like to, take a card/piece of paper and a pen. Write a word or draw a picture that expresses how you feel as we gather together; it may just be something very simple. We're not going to share them out loud. Instead, in a moment we'll place them on the table (or by the candle that we're going to light). Sometimes it's good to be aware of how we feel before we start. Then we can let it go, at least for a while.

**OR**

- B** Use the cards/pieces of paper in front of you to write or draw something that shows how you are feeling. We won't be sharing these out loud. Feel free to do whatever you want; there is no right or wrong. You can place what you have written by the candle/on the table when you have finished. Perhaps imagine that you are laying down any troubles as you do so.

**OR**

- C** In front of you are some things you can write or draw with. If you'd like to take a card/piece of paper and a pen, write a word or draw a picture that expresses how you feel as we gather together; it may just be something very simple. We're not going to share them out loud. What we'll do in a moment is place them on the table (or by the candle that we're going to light). As we think about how we're feeling, this statement by St Paul, one of the founders of the Christian church, may be helpful:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (1 Corinthians 1: 3-4)

**OR**

- D** *Your own words.*

**Shared reflection**

**Adapt one of the following or make up your own.**

- A** As we draw this reflection to a close, have any thoughts come to you that you would like to share with others in the group? (Please don't feel you have to share.)

**OR**

- B** We have a time now to share some of your reflections, if you would like to. There is no pressure to say anything and there are no right or wrong answers. You might like to sum up your reflection in just one or two words. For example, "I felt..."(*leader supplies their own example*).

**OR**

- C** I wonder if any of you had any promptings that you would like to share with the rest of the group.

**OR**

- D** *Your own words.*
-

# Finding comfort

Choose from one of the following.

## Option 1 A reading from the Bible

Select from:

### A Psalm 23 (to be read slowly):

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.  
 He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
 I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
 your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
 You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

OR

### B Select a reading from those offered on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Bible readings').

**Introduce the reading by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.**

We shall now listen to one of the world's most famous spiritual poems, Psalm 23 from the Christian Bible. (Or, if another reading is used: We shall now listen to a reading from the Christian Bible.) I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, "What is this reading saying to me?"

OR

### C This reading comes from a song book in the Bible, known as the book of Psalms. The psalms contain songs of joy and sadness. Often the writers are calling out for answers and comfort. (For alternative readings, rephrase as appropriate.) I will read this through twice. Feel free to just sit and listen to it the first time. Then I will read an explanation (provide your own) and read the passage through again. Perhaps think about what images or pictures this reading brings to mind.

OR

### D We're now going to listen to Psalm 23, a popular reading for when we need comfort. It comes from the Bible. (Or, if another reading is used: We shall now listen to a reading from the Bible.) I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, "What is this reading saying to me?"

OR

### D Your own words.

**Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the reading, then continue to the next section, "Bringing comfort to the world".**

**If you sense people would like to discuss the passage, you can choose from the questions in the 'Discussing the Bible Readings' download on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').**

## Option 2 Reflecting on a picture

**Instead of the reading, you can reflect on a picture. To avoid copyright issues, try the [Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#) websites, which have photos you can download for free.**

**Invite people to consider one or two questions as they look at the photo. You can choose from the following:**

- What is the piece doing? Does it tell a story? Evoke a feeling? Document an event? Present an idea? If so, what? Does it speak of comfort in any way?
- How does it make you feel?
- Are there aspects that bring you comfort?
- Does the piece bring to mind any of your own life events or memories, especially ones that brought you comfort at the time or do so now?
- Does the photo connect you to something greater (perhaps the source of comfort)? If so, in what ways?
- How have your feelings changed from the time you started looking at it till now?

**Introduce this section by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.**

- A** We are going to reflect silently now on a photo, and as you do so you may want to ask yourself (*choose one or two questions from the above*).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

**OR**

- B** Spend time looking at this photo. Perhaps think about how this photo makes you feel, and whether it brings you any comfort. There are no wrong answers; what does it make you think of? You might like to write down some thoughts either on the photo itself or around the border. You can use just one word if you like.

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

**OR**

- C** We are going now to look quietly at a photo. Sometimes photos can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or for God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we look at this photo, you may want to ask yourself (*choose from the above questions*).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

**OR**

- D** Your own words.

**Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the photo, then continue to the next section, “Bringing comfort to the world”, or carry on with the option in light green below if you’re having a longer session.**

**After the reflection, adapt one of the following:**

- A** I wonder if anyone has any thoughts they would like to share? Have you noticed things that bring you comfort or make you sad?



**OR**

- B** Give each person a copy of the photo and then say: If you feel comfortable, place your photo (with your written thoughts on it) on the floor and gather round to see how other people have responded. If you would rather not share your reflections, that is fine; just fold your photo in half to indicate this.

**OR**

- C** I wonder what you have noticed in this photo. Are there things that bring you comfort or make you sad? As we continue to recognize our sadness, I'd like to share this quote by Washington Irving.

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

**OR**

- D** Your own words.

### **Option 3** Reflecting on a poem

*The poem is written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. If it is too long, you may want to choose a section. You are welcome to give each person a copy. The poem can either be read out loud by yourself or someone else in the group, or it can be read silently. Introduce the poem by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.*

- A** We are going to reflect silently now on a poem, written by a chaplain, Mark Berry. You may want to focus on an image or phrase and ask why it strikes you.  
At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

**OR**

- B** We are now going to read through (part of) a poem twice. It is based on Psalm 139 in the Christian Bible and is written by Mark Berry, who works for the church. As you listen, perhaps see if one or two things speak to you and what they might be saying. You don't have to think about this too much; go with your gut reaction and don't stress about coming up with a perfect answer. Think about what speaks to you and why.  
At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

**OR**

- C** We are going now to reflect quietly on a poem written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. The poem is based on Psalm 139 in the Christian Bible. Sometimes poems can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we think about this poem, you may want to focus on a phrase, an image or an idea.  
At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like to.

**OR**

- D** Your own words.

### **Poem by Mark Berry – based on Psalm 139**

You search me and know me,  
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.  
 There are many parts of my story that I race past, holding my breath lest they raise their heads  
 and show me up for who I fear I am.  
 Small things that grow from my hidden corners, swelling, filling, misshaping me.  
 Things I am told, looks that I catch in the eyes of another.  
 The leaping of my heart as heat rises and dizziness flows.  
 They grow and overwhelm, forcing me back into their dark places. Deep into my shame I have sunk.  
 You search me and know me,  
 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.  
 In the night my spirit wakes and taunts me,  
 The voices that tell me I can do no good, that I have no value, That remind me of my failings,  
 of my weakness,  
 of my splinters and shards.

The faces that stare with eyes which condemn and dismiss me, That look with disdain and  
 judgement, that puncture my faith. The sneers and comparisons, the taunts and the jokes.  
 Deep into my shame I have shrunk.  
 You search me and know me,  
 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.  
 In the morning I face myself in the mirror and see what I have done. My past actions overwhelm  
 me and change what I see,  
 They tell me I am wicked, they tell me I am ugly,  
 They drown my goodness, they suffocate my beauty.  
 They fight to own and define me, and too often they win. They become who I am and what I may be.  
 Deep into my shame I have grown.

Where can I go from your Spirit?  
 Where can I flee from your presence?  
 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
 if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
 even there your hand will guide me,  
 your right hand will hold me fast.  
 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the  
 darkness will not be dark to you;  
 the night will shine like the day,  
 for darkness is as light to you.  
 Your eyes search me,  
 You know my heart.  
 See through my shame,  
 See deep into my hidden places,  
 See through my deepest fear and pain, Show me what you see,  
 Show me the me you created,  
 Show me the goodness you know is there,  
 Show me the strength I cannot feel,  
 Show me the beauty I cannot see,  
 Show me the light in my darkness,  
 Show me the music in my soul.  
 Help me to release the things I have done which I have let define me,  
 Help me to release the things that others have done to me that crush my spirit,  
 Help me to know the difference I make for others,



Help me to trust the difference you make in me,  
 Help me to be the me you see,  
 Help me to be the me you love,  
 Help me to recognise myself in you.  
 For you created my inmost being;  
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
 Mother and Father God,  
 Creator, Redeemer, Comforter,  
 Search me, know me, love me,  
 Help me to search myself,  
 Help me to know myself,  
 Help me to love myself.  
 Forgive me for the things I have done that shame me, Forgive me for the things I regret not doing,  
 Forgive me for not trusting in your grace and love. Help me to accept total forgiveness,  
 Help me to live from this day without guilt or shame, Help me to trust in your grace and love,  
 Lead me forward in peace and new life.  
 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any  
 offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

(Sections from Psalm 139 New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®  
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***Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the poem, then continue to the next section, "Bringing comfort to the world", or carry on with the option below if you're having a longer session.***

***After the silent reflection, adapt one of the following:***

**A** I wonder if anyone has any thoughts about the poem they would like to share?

Were there any images, phrases or ideas that struck you?

What emotions did you have as you read/listened to the poem?

Were there any words or phrases that surprised you?

**OR**

**B** We now have time for you to share some of your reflections, if you would like to. There is no pressure to say anything and there are no right answers. You might like to write down some of your thoughts before we start. (*Short time of silence.*) Would anyone like to share a thought, word, or idea?

**OR**

**C** I wonder what reactions you had to this poem?

Did you think about it in relation to yourself? Or did you imagine it applying to a friend, family member or someone who is close to you?

Were there any images, phrases or ideas that you found especially comforting?

Did this poem remind you of any personal experiences or feelings?

If you could ask the poet (Mark) one question about the poem, what would it be?

**OR**

**D** *Your own words.*

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# Bringing comfort to the world

*This section follows the reading, photo or poem. If you want some music to accompany it, you can play a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists').*

**Adapt one of the following or make up your own:**

**A** We now have a short time of silence when you can think about an item in the news, a person you are concerned about, or a situation you face. You can send comfort to the situation through positive thoughts, or ask God as you understand God to bring comfort to those involved.

**OR**

**B** Think about or write down three things that bring you comfort or make you feel connected to more than just yourself. This might be people, hobbies, or something you think of as divine. *(Short period of silence.)* Perhaps now you might think about or write down some ways that you could bring comfort to other people.

**OR**

**C** If God exists and was here with us, what feelings would you express to God? (It's OK to be angry.) What situation or people would you ask God to bring comfort to? We'll have a few moments of quiet while you think about this, and then an opportunity to share your thoughts if you would like to. ***(At the end, if appropriate, you could ask people to say a collective 'Amen'.)***

**OR**

**D** Your own words.

**To bring this section to a close, use the following prayer.**

Let us pray. This is the serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr.

God, grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as God did, this broken world  
As it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that God will make things right  
If I surrender to God's will;  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with God forever in the next.  
We say together: **Amen**

## Conclusion

**Use one of the following:**

**A** We conclude our time with a poem, "The Guest House," written by a Sufi mystic.

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.  
Together we say **Amen**

**OR**

- B** Focus on one or two things that have spoken to you from this session. Hold them in your mind for a few moments. You might like to think about this over the next few days. We give thanks for the time we have spent together, for the thoughts we have had, and for the comfort that we leave with.

**OR**

- C** We conclude this time together with a short prayer.

Each day will bring its own moments of struggle and peace,  
Each day will write its own story on our lives,  
Each day will have times that will shape who we will become.  
May the God who knows us, who knows our pain and our joy,  
Be known to each of us in all our moments.  
May the God who breathed life into our bodies and set the heavens in motion,  
Bless us, comfort us and bring us peace.  
We all say together, **Amen**

**OR**

- D** *Your own words.*

### **Too much silence?**

***The shorter version will be largely silent, with the option of accompanying music. If people would like more time to talk, you could:***

- Use some of the discussion questions with the reading in the **Discussing the Bible Readings download on the Church Support Hub** (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').
- Allow time for reactions to the photo or poem, as suggested in the light green sections.
- Invite other members of the group to read the poem and the prayers (if you use them).