

# Experiences and recommendations of pastoral support for divorced and separated clergy spouses

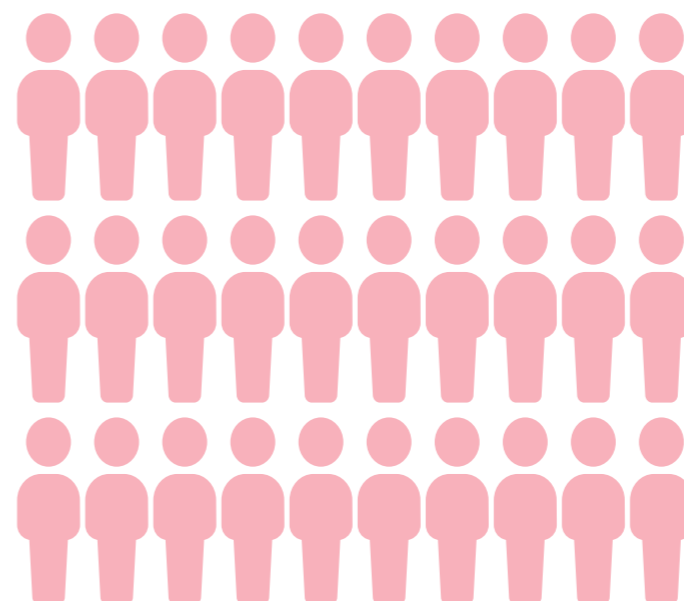
Key findings

## Overall key messages

**Divorce and separation are deeply impactful** experiences for divorced and separated clergy spouses.

There is a need to **develop pastoral care** and support in this area.

**More pastoral care and support is needed from the Church.**



There were

# 27

participants who had experienced divorce and separation in the Christian faith community.

## Background and study

**Divorce and separation are known to be difficult experiences** but less is known specifically about the impact of divorce and separation on clergy spouses.

This study was conducted in 2022 by the **Division of Psychology at the University of Chester**, funded by a legacy left to Broken Rites.



The research consisted of an online survey and interviews. These focused on the following questions:

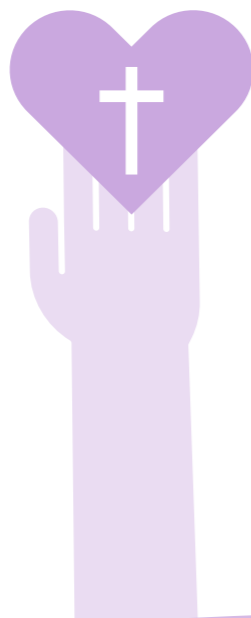
- **What is pastoral care?**
- **What were the experiences of support and pastoral care for divorced and separated clergy spouses?**
- **What does good pastoral care look like?**
- **What recommendations can be made to inform the future provision of pastoral care for divorced and separated clergy spouses?**



## Key findings

**What is Pastoral care?** Those who took part told us pastoral care should be:

- **Deliberate – both an individual and organisational responsibility**
- **Meeting holistic needs**
- **Person-centred**
- **Accessible**
- **Continuous**



### Expectations of Clergy Marriage

There were **high expectations** of clergy marriage, spouses and families.

These expectations could **act as barriers** to be able to share when experiencing marriage difficulties and breakdown.

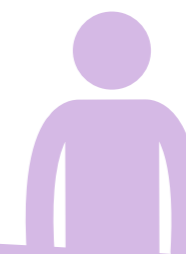
### Lack of support

**Financial, legal and housing support** were the most common areas in which support was not received but was clearly needed.



Failings in support were often related to:

- **not being given information on how to access support**
- **not being listened to**



- **no action being taken in response to concerns shared and questions asked**
- **support being for the clergy member not the spouse.**

### Support needed



Overall, **50% received support**, most support was during or after marriage breakdown and not prior to.

**Most support came from family and friends** and external agencies rather than the Church.

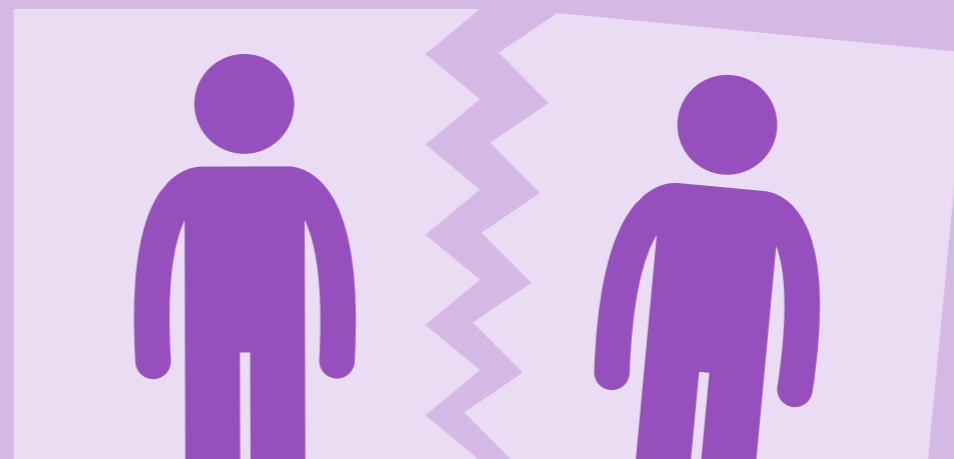
There were some **positive experiences** of support from Church representatives.

**Spiritual, emotional, social and friendship support** was most likely to be received from friends.



### Impact of Separation and Divorce

**Isolation from the community and loss of community** were common impacts for divorced and separated clergy spouses.



There was often an impact on faith and spirituality.

**Guilt, shame and trauma** were shared as part of the experience of divorce and separation and as enduring impacts.

## Recommendations

The findings from the research suggest a need to develop pastoral care as follows:

### The 4 P's of Pastoral Care

- 1**
- P**re-emptive Care
- Provide pastoral care from start of marriage
  - Provide accessible, clear, independent information about where to access support for marriage difficulties from the start

- 2**
- P**ersonalised Individual Holistic Care
- Treat people with dignity and respect-person-centred and trauma informed
  - Recognise each person's experience is unique
  - Multi-faceted care – including practical, financial, housing, legal, emotional, spiritual, wellbeing

- 3**
- P**ersistent and Consistent Care
- Care needs to be proactive
  - Provide an accessible, independent point of contact for the clergy spouse
  - Ensure contacts are trained, able to signpost, have relevant knowledge of a range of issues, and understand of the impact of clergy separation and divorce
  - Ensure care is consistent and continuing

- 4**
- P**urposeful Reflection and Change
- There is an institutional responsibility to care and to respond to information reported and take action where needed
  - Church and congregations should reflect on their expectations of clergy marriage, spouses and families
  - Respect individual choices
  - Offer opportunities to be part of the wider community if desired



When using this information please reference this document as follows:  
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