

The following guidelines may be of assistance to clergy in responding appropriately to callers at the vicarage door.

The Guidelines may appear at first sight to be over cautious. This reflects the society in which we live, the fact that many clergy experience abuse and violence at the vicarage door, and the need, even for disciples of Jesus, to avoid exposing themselves, or those to whom they minister, to **unnecessary** involvement in such incidents.

Ascertain what level of need exists locally, and decide what degree of help you will be able to offer. (Some with years of experience say that the needs of many callers have changed so much that clergy should only seek to offer a very basic level of assistance. This might be limited to giving information, or making referrals to agencies better equipped to meet the needs of the caller. Whilst recognising the reality of this observation, these guidelines also make provision for clergy who wish to offer more by way of the ministry they offer at the vicarage door.)

Two different sets of Guidelines are offered, drawn up to meet two distinct contexts:

FIRST SET OF GUIDELINES – If you decide that help will consist of information only. (This may be because you are already engaged, or for reasons of safety.)

- ✓ Try to decide before opening the door whether or not you are only able to offer limited help.
- ✓ Try to ensure that callers never leave feeling rejected or unloved. Even when you do not give the help requested, something positive can be offered.
- ✓ Have consistent 'rules' in this situation and let the caller know clearly and quickly what you can offer on this occasion. It may help to explain why your time is limited.
- ✓ Do give information about other sources of help. Have a printed list of resource centres to which the caller can be directed (*local shelters, social services, psychiatric social worker, citizen's advice bureaux, Alcoholics Anonymous, CRUSE, Relate etc*).

- ✓ Work with other local churches to provide care cover on a rota.
- X Do not enter into a 'pastoral engagement'
- X Think carefully before inviting any caller inside, particularly if you are the only adult on the premises.

SECOND SET OF GUIDELINES – If you decide you are able to offer more than information

- ✓ Ensure that the ground rules are consistently applied.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to say 'no' – it will help the caller if you are clear about what you can and can't do.
- ✓ Remember that the traditional response of a cup of tea and a sandwich can meet both a spiritual and a practical need, and demonstrates God's care for the caller.
- ✓ Do hold on to the 'stories' that people tell.
- ✓ Make arrangements with a local café to provide tea and food on production of a voucher.
- ✓ Keep food from Harvest services to hand out.
- ✓ A stock of canned drinks can save having to make tea at an inconvenient time.
- ✓ Set times and boundaries when help is available and do not make 'knee-jerk' responses 'on demand'.
- ✓ Help callers with a long story to get to the point. Ask them "What do you want me to do?"
- ✓ If appropriate, refer people to specialised caring agencies.
- X Do not look for thanks

MONEY

- It generally helps to have a 'no money' policy.
- Demands for money often come when people say 'social services are closed'. In fact they are never closed. The number of the duty social worker can be obtained from the local police.
- Demands for train tickets have been met by people going to buy the ticket, but callers can present the ticket for cash refund.
- Demanding money with menaces is a criminal offence.

RESOURCES

Places of Worship Security Manual, Nick Toulson (National Co-ordinator of Church Watch), Berkswell Publishing, £7.97. ISBN 090 463 1125.

Affirmation and Accountability: Practical suggestions for preventing clergy stress, sickness and ill-health retirement, The Society of Mary and Martha, Sheldon, Dunsford, Exeter EX6 7LE, 01647 – 252752.

The Security of Single Clergy: A Cause for Concern, The Revd Canon Christine Dyer of Derby Diocese.

EIG Guidance Notes for Clergy, Section 3 Health and Safety, Ecclesiastical Insurance 2003.

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, H Wilcox, Church House Publishing, 2003.

<http://www.london.anglican.org> (Go to Regulations and under Ministry to Clergy Safety.)

<http://www.london.anglican.org/DACResidential> (see Chapter 14 of residential property handbook – ‘Security’)

www.nationalchurchwatch.com (click on ‘downloadable publications’ for advice on personal clergy safety and security)

www.ecclesiastical.co.uk (click on ‘Church Insurance’ and then click on ‘Insurance and Security’ and then click on ‘Guidance notes Health and Safety’. Open Guidance Notes document and go to section on ‘Personal Security’)

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CLERGY SAFETY GUIDELINES