

Mental Health, Wellbeing and the Church

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I have been a psychotherapist for over 30 years. Before I trained as a therapist, I worked as a mental health nurse in areas including acute and adolescent psychiatry. Over the same length of time, I have been a church-going Christian. I am now a parish priest in Buriton. For over 30 years I have been in a dialogue between my Christian faith, church and the mental health field. Over recent years I have been very aware of the increase in the impact of mental health issues on relationships, families and in the business sphere.

There are no simple answers and there are often many factors involved in the emergence of these issues. In my experience as a therapist, I have noticed one factor that comes up a lot. Loneliness. This can sometimes follow bereavement, the loss of an important relationship or pressure of work. Research seems to show that there is a significant overlap between loneliness and mental health issues. While there are of course limits on how much church can support people with mental health issues, I do think churches are often well placed to offer hospitality and connection to people. Activities like coffee mornings or other points of engagement can help offset feelings of isolation and loneliness. The positive impact of going to a group where people remember your name and something about your life cannot be underestimated.

On 4th, 6th and 7th July I will be giving three evening talks at St Mary's Church Buriton in which I will explore further how church can positively and realistically respond to issues of wellbeing and mental health. These will also be live streamed and recorded. Free tickets are at <https://www.stmarysburiton.church/> (please scroll down to Events)