

Deanery Synod July 9th, 2026

Good evening. I am the Rev James Trowsdale, Rector of the Ampleforth Group of Churches, and a part-time hospital and hospice chaplain.

I have been asked to say a few words this evening about mission, especially in relation to pastoral and spiritual care for those who are approaching the end of life, and bereavement support for loved ones as they begin the journey of grief.

This evening I want to do three things: *first*, to ground this work in our shared calling to the cure of souls; *second*, to share what pastoral and spiritual care can offer at the end of life and in bereavement; and *third*, to invite us to build a more connected deanery-wide network of care.

To set the scene, when I was installed as priest in my parishes, I received my licence from Bishop Paul with the words, “*Receive this cure, your care and mine.*” He was referring to the “cure of souls.” For hundreds of years, the parish priest received into his care the souls of those who lived within the boundaries of the parish. This responsibility was known as *cura animarum*, the “cure of souls.” Cure also meant charge as well as care, and it was the responsibility and duty of the curate to be available at life’s crucial moments: to accompany and tend to the souls of those in the parish in times of birth, illness, marriage, crisis and death. Carl Jung described the soul as “*the living core of human meaning* “. As well as this specific role of the curate and priest, I would suggest that *we all have an obligation and responsibility* to connect to this core of human meaning and care for the souls of those around us.

So, what does that care look like? To begin, I would like to quote words from Isaiah, chapter 40: “*Comfort my people, says the Lord, comfort my people.*” The Letter of James says, “*Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*” Last Sunday in the Gospel we heard the

words of Jesus: “*Come to me, all who are weary, and I will give you rest.*”

These words of comfort speak, I believe, to all those who are experiencing soul pain. In his book, *‘Care of the Soul’*, Thomas Moore writes that “we all need that rest for our souls, more than we realise,” and describes “loss of soul” as “the greatest malady of our time.” When the soul is neglected, he says, it may show itself in “obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning.” He also observes that we have few specialists of the soul to advise us when we face moods, emotional pain, or threatening evils.

I would reply that clergy and lay people are, in this sense, *specialists of the soul*. From my own experience with patients and bereaved people, I strongly echo those words from James: prayer is *powerful and effective*

I saw this before arriving at Ampleforth in November 2022, when I worked full time as a hospital chaplain for Hull and East Riding from 2018. During Covid, and later through referrals from community palliative care nurses, I offered pastoral and spiritual support to people at the end of life. They came from a wide range of philosophical and spiritual backgrounds. Some began by saying that they were not religious, and some were initially wary or even antagonistic, yet many still allowed me to journey with them. *The key was listening to their stories*. Over time, I became part of the care the nurses were offering, and the feedback I received was that pastoral and spiritual care made a significant difference. It brought many patients a sense of peace and reconciliation: with the world, with their relationships, with themselves, and with God. In hospital and community settings alike, I often witnessed people move along the existential path to a point of spiritual need, where presence, prayer, confession and anointing brought comfort and peace.

On taking up my parish post, I determined to continue this work as a primary part of my role. I have linked up with the local GP practice in Ampleforth and with the community palliative care nurses working out of St Catherine’s Hospice in Scarborough. One of them, Lucy Kaiser, who attended our bereavement group last year, has agreed to pass on details of patients she encounters who give consent for me to contact them. Lucy now works in the Whitby area, and she is also endeavouring to link up with clergy there, so

that people seeking spiritual care may be referred locally. Similarly, across this deanery, I hope we can all be ready to respond when someone in our community needs that support.

Similarly, if you become aware of anyone from your parishes who is admitted to York or Scarborough Hospitals, please let me know, and I will arrange for chaplaincy support to be offered.

Let me turn now to *bereavement support*. [pause] At Adam's request, Mel and I have been facilitating a bereavement support group since September 2025. It meets at Beadlam Grange Bistro on the second Monday of each month at 2.00 p.m. We usually have ten to twelve people attending, some of whom have been with us from the first session. The group is not intended to offer counselling. Rather, it provides a safe and relaxed place where people can enjoy a cuppa, talk about a range of experiences, and begin to form friendships and support one another. I also keep in touch with Pauline Straw, who runs the groups in Kirkbymoorside and Malton. *The common cry from these groups, and from others, is that there are not enough of them.* As a result, I am compiling a directory of organisations that run bereavement support groups in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. If you are aware of any, please let me know. This directory will be a resource for clergy and lay people, as well as funeral directors, GP practices, social prescribers, community palliative care staff, health care workers and others. If you can think of any useful contacts in your area, please also let me know. I will then get in touch to network and co-ordinate support. Sam Collins, the social prescriber for West Ayton and Snainton, Sherburn and Rillington, Derwent, and Ampleforth GP surgeries, reached out to me and attended the last bereavement café to good effect.

Pastoral and spiritual support is a significant demonstration of *God's mission*. In a world where many are seeking solace and are suffering through loneliness, isolation, grief and spiritual pain, we have the privilege of sharing in the cure of souls for everyone in our parishes, whether they are churchgoers or not. I believe we have calling to offer *peace and wholeness* as a priority in our pastoral and spiritual care. That care may be offered privately with individuals, or collectively through services and acts of remembrance: during the Remembrance season, at All Souls, in

memorial services, baby loss services, healing services, and through prayer requests for healing and remembrance. A Book of Memories, or 'memory tree' in church, can also become both a focus for prayer and a way of inviting people to remember particular days that are special to them.

Finally, I want to suggest how we might work together across the deanery. In my benefice, Fr Kentigern at Our Lady and St Benedict's Roman Catholic Church and I work closely together to promote services and activities for our community, including ecumenical services of healing and reconciliation. I hope to host similar events, and perhaps these could be offered around the deanery on a regular basis.

So, to summarise pastoral and spiritual care is a vital part of our mission. Prayer, presence, listening and sacrament can bring peace and reconciliation to those who are dying and to those who grieve. Bereavement support groups can provide safe and gentle spaces where friendships and healing may begin. And by working together – clergy, lay people, health professionals, funeral directors, voluntary organisations and community contacts – we can make this support more visible, accessible and effective across the deanery. Together, we can build a compassionate network for the care of souls, so that no one facing death, grief or spiritual pain feels forgotten, and so that the peace of Christ may be offered tenderly and faithfully at the point of deepest need, where healing and flourishing can be found. Thank you.