Preparations for Pastoring 0thers in Times of Extensive Loss

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Here is how I would lead a group of clergy preparing for this pandemic to hit their community using military principles from chaplains.

1. Perform and provide. Military chaplains are responsible for all the service members in their unit. Consider who is on the parish team who can be multipliers in case the clergy get overwhelmed or become casualties. Ministry must continue whether the rector does it or not. Empower those who will take over when clergy get infected and taken out. Start using them now so they know what to do. The pastor ensures ministry is provided to all parishioners throughout each phase of the crisis, but she may not be the one who performs each ministry intervention.

2. Plan. Take the team you have chosen and gather them to make a plan. On that plan consider what will happen at each phase: pre-crisis, combat/crisis, post-crisis. In that plan imagine the crisis phase first and how to provide meaningful and efficient pastoral care. Then imagine the pre-crisis phase by asking, "if the worst happened and we knew in advance, what do we wish we had done?"

3. Nurture the living, comfort the wounded, honor the dead. Each of these categories requires different pastoral care. Train up laity to know what to do in each phase.

* For example, religious education about the pandemic is important to nurture the living. Are the laity prepared to offer this if the pastor is unavailable? One way to nurture the living would be to have groups consider the question, "If I come down with the virus what kind of care would I like from my family, friends, and clergy when I am isolated, on a ventilator, or facing death?” Liz Powell helps hospice patients make these types of plans so that the care is patient-centered rather than clergy or BCP centered. It could make for an interesting Adult Forum!
* Clergy are well-trained to comfort the wounded, but are the laity on the team confident they can take over if the clergy are infected?
* Honoring the dead category is clergy intense. Having a set service with a pandemic oriented sermon and a cracker jack team of altar guild, musician, and bulletin template ready to go can reduce some stress.