

Pastoral Care at a Physical Distance

Leonard M. Madden

Abstract

This dissertation explores the Church's duty and calling to exercise pastoral care, including that inherent in continued witness in worship, during a period of pronounced anxiety and in which physical proximity and touch are often inadvisable. The Church embodies centuries-long traditions of pastoral engagement, and this outreach is enacted through highly-networked communities that draw on the ethical commitments of Church members who live out their discipleship in the world; the Church offers the power of intercession, and the symbolic richness of the sacraments in speaking of community, connection, welcome, nourishment, and healing. Moreover, the Church brings to the world the fundamental conviction that the kingdom of God is coming into the world through people who are marginalised and disempowered.

I argue that, in order to bear faithful witness to Christ, who overcame what would otherwise be the conceptually exclusionary categories of *creator* and *created*, everyone engaged in Christian pastoral care should be vigilant in attempting to discern exclusionary ('othering') forces that, whether accidentally or deliberately, cause people to become hidden and to fall out of a given society, or, indeed, prevent people from entering a given society. By placing emphasis on the Incarnation as the outworking of love in which God came to make a home *with* us – and, in this, also to make a home *for* us (see Jn 14:2) – I propose that a Christ-like way to conceive of pastoral care centres on the importance of *home*: on the importance of a sense of *home* as not simply a space in which to live, but one that allows its inhabitants to flourish. This work examines examples of minorities being excluded from dominant Irish society and culminates in offering an example of how a majority is frequently excluded.