

## ABSTRACT

Eugene Thomas Griffin

**Do clergy acknowledge their own feelings of grief, how does this affect their ministry and does the Church in all its manifestations support them in their grief journey?**

*How trust in God, secular theory, self-awareness, support and openness in relationships, can be woven together by clergy into a coping strategy.*

This dissertation originated from a self-examination of my own past losses, as I prepared for ordained ministry, and a curiosity about how clergy cope with their own grief and the effect that it has on their own life, ministry and faith.

My primary research, involved interviewing ordained clergy who are currently serving at various levels within the church, and members of the laity who have a particular professional interest in this area.

Weaving secular theories with theology, praxis and the Holy Bible, has been challenging, but in the process, I came to see the crown Jesus wore on the cross. Each strand, though separate and of its own type, weaves around one another. I found that no one approach works for everybody as we are all unique and we grieve in our own ways. But healing comes by the weaving of these strands into a unity of faith, understanding and support.

I explore what we mean by the “suffering God”, whether this concept questions His omnipotence, and what we mean by an incarnational approach to ministry. I look to the Master at work and the Psalms with which He was intimately familiar for a pathway to embrace our humanity.

I use Pannenberg’s “openness for God” as a motif for guiding clergy in our relationships with one another and with our congregations. I examine secular grief theories, which have a particular resonance for clergy and their ministry.

I find that there is a need to “bind one’s own wounds” as Nouwen puts it, and for clergy to embrace the concept of self-awareness and self-care. I show that clergy need to support, help and love one another as Christ loves us.