

ABSTRACT

Title: Saving Lives: An Examination of the Potential for Ministry to the Suicidal in the Church of Ireland

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Suicide is a tragic reality which impacts significantly on Irish culture. Pastoral experience has revealed that clergy are woefully ill-equipped to deal with this phenomenon. This is the case both in the aftermath to suicide and in encounters with those who are currently struggling with suicidal thoughts. A fundamental aspect of the problem is that clergy are neither trained to identify the warning signals that indicate suicidal intent nor are they given an understanding of the nature of the depressive illnesses which drive people to suicide. It is as a response to this particular deficiency in pastoral training that this thesis is written. Its focus is not care of the bereaved but ministry to current sufferers who are in desperate need of pastoral support and assistance.

The thesis extends over three chapters and attempts to give a rounded understanding of suicide from both a theological and a practical angle. After outlining the case for ministry to the suicidal in the Introduction, the proceeding chapters explore suicide from three very definite perspectives. Chapter one investigates the biblical texts relating to suicide and asks whether Scripture offers any clear guidance on the matter. Chapter two offers an extensive survey of both secular and religious attitudes to suicide from antiquity to the present day. Particular emphasis is given to the major theological voices which have determined the Church's thinking. Chapter three engages thoroughly with contemporary therapeutic responses to suicide. This involves an explanation of the suicidal condition and more vitally a discussion of how ministry might function in this context. The chapter ends with suggestions for a way forward.

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