

Q & A...



Just Ask Hillary!

*Love * Sex * Loss* participants were invited to ask questions anonymously – many thanks to those of you who did! The brave and wise Hillary Kimzey, Episcopal priest and hospital chaplain, stepped up to answer them.

Q: How can a relationship (friend group, work, parental, love) bounce back after so much covid stress?

Hillary+: Slowly and awkwardly, I imagine, especially if there has been conflict around hot button issues like vaccination. I'm thinking a lot of patience, honesty, and gentleness will be needed, and it's not impossible! We might not have experience bouncing back from a pandemic before, but we've all been through other losses and stressors, so we all have experience making it through those.

Q: How do I navigate changing views on faith in long term relationships?

Hillary+: This is such a great question, and my very unsatisfying answer is "one day at a time." My spouse and I both grew up Southern Baptist in evangelical households, but we both ended up going different directions when we left. I became an Episcopal priest and my spouse is more agnostic/atheist with some appreciation for pagan traditions. I support them in their exploration, just as they supported me in mine. We have great conversations, and we're honest with each other.

Q: How does shame around sex inhibit our ability to feel close and honest with God?

Hillary+: I think that it might make it harder for us to believe that God loves our entire self if we struggle to love and accept our sexuality. If we can love that part of ourselves, we might have an easier time believing that God does too. Or maybe vice versa!

Q: How do you forgive a partner who hurt you very deeply and said the worst of intimate backlash at you purposely to hurt you and always thinks you are cheating on them?

Hillary+: Oof. How do I forgive is a question I've gotten often, but I'm not sure there is a step-by-step method. If you say to yourself, I forgive them, but it doesn't feel true yet, then you might need some more time and support to get there. Has there been a sincere apology, and does the partner realize the depth of your hurt? I feel like true understanding between you two needs to come first, if it can. Another question worth pondering is this: does forgiveness equal acceptance? Perhaps you can step back and see that your partner is struggling with something big that may have little to nothing to do with you--and that you do not have to accept that kind of treatment from someone, especially if they say they love you. Some hurts in our partners are not ours to fix--they are for the partner along with supportive therapists to explore and heal, sometimes with our support or sometimes on their own. If your partner isn't able to trust you and is hurting you on purpose, even verbally-- that does not sound healthy. :(

Q: About the journey of grief... What are signs you may have not taken time to grieve?

Hillary+: Great question. The first important truth is that no one grieves the same way as anyone else. What might be healthy grief for one person could be unhealthy for another. Grief is a rollercoaster and we're often just along for the ride. Still, some warning signs: I think if you find yourself adamantly avoiding talking about the loss, avoiding situations or people that remind you of it, or constantly trying to avoid feeling all the feelings of grief, those might be warning signs. If you have people or places where you can safely talk about the loss and you allow yourself to feel the messy and not very fun emotions of grief, you're probably on the right path.

Q: Where is God when you have been hurt in relationships?

Hillary+: I think God is right there with me, feeling sad and grieved by the conflict and offering me and the other person support and love and wisdom, if we listen for it.

Q: How does the Episcopal Church approach what it means to be "incarnational" – to be living out our faith in our gloriously diverse bodies?

Hillary+: I think we are working on this by trying always to learn how to be better places for all bodies-- making our buildings and worship accessible to people with disabilities is something more and more congregations are working on, and thank God for that.

Q: What do you know now about your faith and life that you wish you would have known when you were younger?

Hillary+: Questions are okay and good and important! In fact, they are often more important than the answers. Also, your parents mean well, but that doesn't mean they're always right.