



TRANSFORMING **CHURCH**
TRANSFORMING **LIVES**



'The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church'

Resources for Small Groups following the autumn study days on the Faith and Order Commission report, led by the Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry Team

October 2017

Introduction

At the two study days on *The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church* held this autumn, we closed with a time of considering how this new resource, and its successor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse*, might be used in local contexts such as parishes and chaplaincies. Full notes and presentations from the meetings of 30th September and 2nd October are now widely available, and what follows can best be used in dialogue with those.

As the report itself states, it is not merely an academic treatise to be left gathering dust nor is it a policy document setting out procedures to be (rightly) complied with. It calls for a different kind of conversation.

One possible setting for such a conversation would be a small group. Devoting some small group study time to considering the report, and to starting to do the 'theological work' it commends (p.9) could have a significant effect on the life of the local church as well as on our missional engagement in a wider world suspicious of church claims to be taking the dark history of abuse seriously.

The following is offered as a resource small groups could use to chart a learning journey through the report, both for their own benefit, for the benefit of their churches and communities. For example, a parish safeguarding team could follow these three sessions and then report back to the PCC or even commend their wider use to the church at large. It is envisaged that reading the report is essential background. It is important too, especially for those who did not attend a study day, to refer to the two fact sheets appended to this resource for a clear definition of sexual abuse (sheet 1) and a list of sources of information, advice and support (sheet 2).

In case it should need to be said, the report reminds us 'All who speak in a public context about abuse should be aware of the likelihood of people being present who have suffered abuse themselves' (p.12). Some care should therefore be taken when deciding how to use this resource, who can lead the group study, their prior training needs and how to identify those who might benefit most. If you would like to discuss this with the Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry Team, then please give Sue Lawrence a call on (01483) 790300 .

The shape of this study resource

The report is organised in three sections, each devoted to a particular statement or affirmation. These affirmations are:

'We should strive to be:

- a church where those who have been hurt by abuse find compassion, and people ready to travel patiently alongside them

- a church where those who commit abuse are called to face human justice, hear God's word of judgement and repent and believe the good news
- a church where all people are welcomed into open and secure communities that make known Christ's reconciling peace.

The three main sections of the report then explore each of these statements in turn, and in each section are some inset Bible study questions. What this resource does is to excerpt those suggested questions (pp.22-23; pp.28-29; pp.38-39), put them in one place together and adapt them into a handout format. This is for ease of accessing together the reflection questions offered by the report as well as for ease of reproducing them for groups to use.

Revd Matt Prior, Adult Discipleship Adviser, 25th October 2017

Session 1

'We should strive to be a church where those who have been hurt by abuse find compassion, and people ready to travel patiently alongside them' (pp. 18-23)

The section begins with two real-life quotations which frame what follows:

I am still having flashbacks and nightmares about the abuse. I cannot work. I cannot make relationships. Why won't somebody in the Church listen to me?
Sally, an out-of-work social worker

I told my house-group about the abuse, and all they said was 'Just get over it'. I don't know if I can keep going to that church. They don't realize how long it all takes. Jade, a student

These quotes are from two people who have felt able put voice to their experience, but there are many who are not ready or able to speak of their experience of abuse, or remain silent because they feel uncertain of the response they will receive.

1. in the light of these personal stories, the many stories unknown and stories that may be known to you, how can your church become 'a church where those who have been hurt by abuse find compassion, and people ready to travel patiently alongside them'?

- Which biblical passages and key words for Christian teaching might be particularly relevant?

- What is the national or diocesan guidance to be taken into account in responding to this question?

2. What might someone who has experienced abuse find difficult or distressing within your church's common life? What responsibility do you have as a church community to identify and address those aspects of your life together?

3. How do we speak of healing to those who have suffered trauma, when we have no 'cure' to offer or professional expertise of our own?

4. How does what happens to us affect who we are? Can you share any personal examples of experiences that have 'formed' you powerfully in either positive or negative ways? How might they make a difference to the way you hear the gospel message?

Bible focus

Read Psalm 88: A prayer for Help in Despondency

<p>¹ O Lord, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, ² let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry. ³ For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. ⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help, ⁵ like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. ⁶ You have put me in the depths of the Pit,</p>	<p>in the regions dark and deep. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. ⁸ You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; ⁹ my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you. ¹⁰ Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you? ¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in the</p>
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grave,

or your faithfulness in Abaddon?

¹² Are your wonders known in the
darkness,

or your saving help in the land of
forgetfulness?

¹³ But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before
you.

¹⁴ O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?

¹⁵ Wretched and close to death from my
youth up,

I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.

¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.

¹⁷ They surround me like a flood all day
long;

from all sides they close in on me.

¹⁸ You have caused friend and neighbour
to shun me; my companions are in
darkness. (NRSV)

5. How do you 'hear' this passage from Scripture in the light of what you have read and what you have been discussing?

6. Many psalms move from lament to thanksgiving (eg Psalm 22), but this one seems to stay with lament from start to finish. How can we make space for it in our prayer as Christians? (You might want to refer to this [resource](#) or search for Bishop Jo Wells' short presentation on the Psalms of lament).

7. How do we make space in our church community for people who may not find it easy to join what some think of as 'normal' worship as they struggle with profound pain and with experiences that trigger the feelings they associate with the abuse they have experienced? Have you ever reflected upon how particular practices we often take for granted might have difficult resonances for someone who has been abused? E.g. the language of forgiveness, physical touch at the Peace, kneeling at the altar, any language and practices which carries overtones of patriarchy.

Closing Prayer

When peace is fragile

Stay with us, Lord

When tempers are raised

Stay with us, Lord

When atrocities occur

Stay with us, Lord

When forgiveness is rejected

Stay with us, Lord

When darkness weighs upon us

Stay with us, Lord

When we cannot see you

Stay with us, Lord

When burdens feel too heavy

Stay with us, Lord

When hope seems faint

Stay with us, Lord

When we are weak

Stay with us, Lord

When faith seems difficult

Stay with us, Lord

God our rock and our strength on whom we lean,
help us to create an atmosphere of trust which allows the unspeakable to be said.
Help us to live with our painful memories.
May we support each other and work towards churches being safe places for each other.
Through Christ, our Lord, **Amen.**

Session 2

'We should strive to be a church where those who commit abuse are called to face human justice, hear God's word of judgement and repent and believe the good news (pp. 24-29)

Churches are a soft touch: they are so trusting. You just have to say I have taken Jesus into my heart, and they believe you. Gary, a convicted sex-offender

I told the bishop about the priest who sexually abused me when I was an altar boy. The bishop offered me counselling; what I wanted him to do was something about the priest who still has altar boys. Robert, a vicar

1. In the light of these personal stories, the many stories which are unknown, and stories that may be known to you, how can your church become 'a church where those who commit abuse are called to face human justice, hear God's word of judgement and repent and believe the good news'?

- What is the national or diocesan guidance to be taken into account in responding to this question?
- Which biblical passages and key words for Christian teaching might be particularly relevant?

2. What would be the likely reaction in your church community to the discovery that a regular worshipping member of the congregation was on the sex offenders register? As well as wanting to follow church policies and procedures very carefully, what difference would believing in God's good news make to your response to the situation?

3. What does true repentance look like? Is it a journey? If so, why do we sometimes seem to be able to travel the full distance, but sometimes find ourselves apparently unable to make much progress?

Bible focus

Read Luke 19.1-10 Jesus and Zacchaeus

19 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (New Revised Standard Version).

5. How do you 'hear' this passage from Scripture in the light of what you have read and what you have been discussing?

6. Jesus shocked and alienated those who might have been his supporters by the way he related to people regarded as notorious public sinners. What might it mean for us to follow him here?

7. What is the relationship between welcome, repentance, restitution and salvation in this passage?

Closing Prayers

We go in the name of the Father

God and Creator,

The one who loves us and calls us into being

The one whose glory is reflected in a human being fully alive

We go in the name of the Son

Saviour and Lord Divine Healer;

Whose power confronted evil

and whose touch brought peace

We go in the name of the Spirit

Holy and Powerful;

Gathering all into healing in the shadow of her wings

Breath of God

Fire of God's love

Drawing us into wholeness into the heart and life of God.

Session 3

We should strive to be a church where all people are welcomed into open and secure communities that make known Christ's reconciling peace (pp. 30-39)

My friend went to a group of about sixty Christian survivors of abuse, and the leader asked how many go to church regularly. The answer was two. *Mary, diocesan counsellor*

I was just about OK for the sex offender to come to our church, but did he really need to come to my house group? *Louise, housewife*

1. In the light of these personal stories, the many stories which are unknown, and stories that may be known to you, how can your church become 'a church where all people are welcomed into open and secure communities that make known Christ's reconciling peace'?

- What is the national or diocesan guidance to be taken into account in responding to this question?
- Which biblical passages and key words for Christian teaching might be particularly relevant?
- Are there some people who would not feel welcome if they turned up on a Sunday morning, despite your good intentions? Why might that be?

2. Survivors' experiences of turning to the church for help and support are hugely variable. Some have found love and acceptance, others rejection and condemnation, or just a refusal to think that anything might need to change in church life in order to make them welcome. What might be the key factors for a positive experience here, and what do they have to do with the teaching about the church and the love of God that we find in the Bible?

Bible focus

Read Colossians 3:5-17

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in

perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

5. How do you 'hear' this passage from Scripture in the light of what you have read and what you have been discussing?

6. What do we need to 'get rid of' (verse 8) in order to be faithful as Christ's church? How do we respond to those who want to belong to the church but do not seem able to 'get rid of' those things that are incompatible with the church's calling?

7. If you had to pick out one sentence or phrase from this passage as a word for the church today as it seeks to face the evil of abuse, what might it be?

A closing prayer produced by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

God of endless love,
ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:
You gave your only Son
to save us by the blood of his cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering
the pain of all who have been hurt
in body, mind, and spirit
by those who betrayed the trust placed in
them.

Hear our cries as we agonize
over the harm done to our brothers and
sisters.

Breathe wisdom into our prayers,
soothe restless hearts with hope,
steady shaken spirits with faith:
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,

enlightened by truth and enfolded in your
mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform our brokenness.

Grant us courage and wisdom, humility
and grace,

so that we may act with justice
and find peace in you.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen

Lord of light **guide us**

Lord of love **enfold us**

Lord of power **protect us**

Lord of grace **go with us**

And the Holy Three bless us

now and for ever more . Amen

Afterword

We need to be a repenting and learning church that recognizes past and present failures and the harm they have caused, and seeks forgiveness from those we have failed and from God.

‘What does it mean for the church to repent, as opposed to individuals within the church? It is an important question, one addressed, along with others, in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse*, the companion document to this one from the Faith and Order Commission. Repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are not just issues that churches have to address in terms of their ministry to others. There is a need for repentance on the part of the churches for the harm they have done’ (pp.40-41).

How do you respond to this statement, and what responsibility might you take on behalf of the church?

Fact sheet one : What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is any activity which has, or can be considered to have, sexual intention and is non-consensual.

Consent cannot be assumed, it must be clear and possible (according to capacity and age)

Sexual abuse is the exertion of power by one person over another in order to seek sexual or personal gratification.

Sexual abuse usually involves grooming and manipulation.

An abuser will cross many boundaries in the process of developing abusive behaviours, They will often target those who appear to be vulnerable, develop plausible personas of trustworthiness and groom those close to their victim.

Sexual abuse may, but does not necessarily, involve penetration. It may be about grooming behaviours, verbal and psychological coercion, distortion of reality; it may be about use of sexualised behaviour, dress; it may be about exposure to or involvement in pornography (often unwitting involvement e.g. pictures of children)

It will be damaging, devastating, distorting and have a life impact; it will shape the life of the abused and take from them a life that could have been. Many are left with feelings of guilt, collusion and shame and fear, which are powerful silencers.

The impact may be emotional, psychological, developmental, physical (sometimes life limiting) and is highly likely to impact on the relationships those who experience abuse form in life, as well as their sense of self confidence and worth.

Sue Lawrence, Senior Tutor for Pastoral Assistant Foundation Training

Fact Sheet Two: Sources of information, advice and support

Local:

Ian Berry, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser. 075 4456 6850

Jane Huttly, Diocesan Safeguarding Training and Development Co-ordinator 01483 79032

Surrey County Council MASH (multi agency safeguarding hub) – for referrals of concern about child or adult abuse 0300 4709100

Diocesan Authorised listeners, contact through Ian Berry, trained pastoral assistants who can provide one to one listening support

Counselling service for clergy & families & diocesan staff 01372 461061

RASAC – rape & sexual abuse 01483 546400 a range of services including counselling

Samaritans 116 123 (24/7); email: jo@samaritans.org

Domestic Abuse – your Sanctuary 01483 776822

Communities Engagement Team suzette.jones@cofeguildford.org.uk

Can provide links to other sources of support or information

National:

Lucy Faithful Foundation www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk , consultancy, training, intervention and support, focused on prevention and perpetrator management and support

www.safeline.org.uk established in the 1990s by survivors of abuse, a range of support and advice services offered

www.survivorsuk.org specifically for men who have experienced abuse

NSPCC www.nspcc.org

Childline 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk