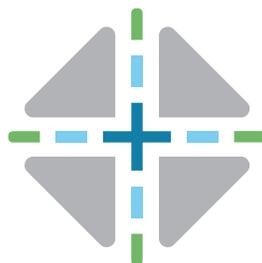


SEXUAL ABUSE AND TRAUMA-SAFETY

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A M25i Conversation White Paper



**MATTHEW 25
INITIATIVE**

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Ministries today are increasingly traumatized and traumatizing.¹ Sexual abuse and trauma in the church is leaving many Christians feeling scared, confused, unprepared, and overwhelmed for what to do next or how to help. This white paper will consider how Anglicans today—or any mere Christian for that matter—can immediately get started with some basic principles and practices to create trauma-safe ministries and organizations. Our ministries can become trauma-safe because of the person of Jesus Christ and his gospel, and our theology of the church is simply too good *not* to be trauma safe. Let us explore how we can create trauma-safe churches in the following sections.

1. NAMING THE PROBLEM: TRAUMA AND ABUSE IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

We live in a world that is east of Eden, that is, a world that is fallen, full of horrors, and full of trauma-responses that humans experience toward the evil that is encountered. When violence comes—whether war, domestic violence, political captivity, sexual abuse, or anything else—our God-given inclination is to survive. The methods we use to survive often leave life-long scars on mind, brain, and body. The violence and threats we experience, especially when extreme, are called traumatic events. When these threats overwhelm our normal coping capacities, this creates posttraumatic stress.

The church today is increasingly traumatized and traumatizing. There seems to be no end to “scandals” and “moral failing” of major Christian leaders, and this leaves many Christians disenchanted, disillusioned, and deconstructing their faith. We are beginning to confront violence and abuse with which we do not know how to cope. What is worse, when trauma and abuse happen in the church, our failure to respond appropriately as members of Christ’s body means that we perpetuate a double-harm for trauma survivors:

“If no one remembers a misdeed or names it publicly, it remains invisible. To the observer, its victim is not a victim, and its perpetrator is not a perpetrator...the suffering of the one and the violence of the other go unseen. A double-injustice occurs—the first when the original deed is done, and the second when it disappears.”²

There are so many survivors in our churches today suffering in silence. They carry wounds hidden in shame among a community that feels overwhelmed and unprepared to offer effective trauma care. Where do we go from here? How can we create ministries or organizations today that are trauma-safe?³

¹ Throughout this White Paper wherever “the church” is referenced, this is not meant to be exclusively ecclesial. All the principles and practices advocated in this document apply to parachurch and ministry organizations as well as to any group that is not explicitly Christian. Sexual abuse and trauma-safety are a universal issue for all people.

² Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory*.

³ For a fuller account of the church and trauma-safety, see Josh Cockayne, Scott Harrower, and Preston Hill, *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*.

Jesus Christ has promised in his holy gospel never to leave or forsake his church but to be with us to the end of the ages (Matt. 28:20). Christ has promised not to leave us as orphans but to send the Spirit of love into our hearts by which we may call God our gracious and righteous Father and become partakers of God's triune life and love (John 14; Rom. 5; 2 Pet. 1). The church therefore is first God's work before it is ours, and we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Creating trauma-safe churches today is possible through God the Trinity's healing works of life, light, and love among us. This will lead us to the principles and practices of a trauma-safe ministry that is governed by the light and love of the triune God of grace.

2. CHRIST'S BODY KEEPS THE SCORE: THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Before turning to the principles and practices of a trauma-safe ministry, it will be helpful first to understand a bit more about the nature of trauma and posttraumatic stress. This will require untangling a few misconceptions, debunking some myths, and providing theological foundations for a Christian approach to traumatology. To do so, consider the following paragraphs as a list of theses (which are *italicized and underlined*) on trauma.

This approach will consider both theological and psychological foundations in tandem since this represents the kind of integrative approach necessary for trauma healing and human flourishing. Since "the glory of God is a human being fully alive," genuine psychological flourishing and care for souls will never be in contradiction with theological bases for this flourishing.⁴ A Christian will never fear discovery of truth since the Christian believes that all truth is God's truth. We must therefore take care "not to reject or condemn truth *wherever* it appears."⁵

Let us attend the following theses on theology, trauma, and the church:

- *Time does not heal all wounds.* The opposite of this statement may be a popular sentiment, but it is a misconception that anyone acquainted with deep grief and loss knows is simply not true. Trauma will never be healed by sweeping it under the rug and "waiting it out" for the simple reason that dissociation and avoidance is the primary pathology involved in posttraumatic stress. As a result, healing requires remembering and mourning the harm one has endured rather than avoiding it.⁶ To the extent we encourage minimizing or denying harm, to that extent we will allow it to fester, much like an open wound becomes gangrenous in the dark without treatment in the light of day.
- Moreover, even with proper care and treatment, *trauma recovery is not linear and does not look like a "cure."* Often, trauma survivors carry terrifying sensation and reminders of the painful past throughout their lives, including but not limited to flashbacks, hypervigilance, nightmares, dissociation, numbness, and feelings of helplessness, rage, terror, and shame. This does not leave us hopeless, but neither does it leave us in sanguine, chipper optimism. Survivors need a Christian community that is not afraid to hold the wounds they have endured, even if those wounds are lifelong. While we may learn to walk again after trauma, we may always walk with a limp. This is because unlike suffering where total cure

⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Ad. Haer.* 4.20.7.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.15-16. For an excellent treatment of the belief that "all truth is God's truth" (originally from St. Ambrose), see Alister McGrath, *Theology: The Basics*.

⁶ For more on this, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

is possible such as a broken arm or a curable disease, trauma is a kind of suffering that “remains” in the memory even after healing and recovery.⁷ While the survivor may not experience the same level of distress when recalling the memory after recovery has taken place, the reminder of evil perpetrated does not fade. This should not alarm us, since even in Scripture we are not promised a return to Eden after Adam’s fall, but something far greater—a forward movement to the maturity of a city where God dwells with his people and the Lamb is the light (Rev. 21). If Jesus bears the scars of his crucifixion in his glorified state (John 20:27) and the Lamb who occupies the throne in heaven appears to have been slain (Rev. 5:6), then surely, we as the church should not feel threatened by wounds that persist even after healing for survivors.

- *Forgiveness is not reconciliation and is not contrary to moral or legal justice.* An unfortunate popular sentiment among committed Christians is that forgiveness is the same as reconciliation or that it denies the claims of justice. This is not necessarily true. In the cross of Christ, we see that even God does not forgive without satisfying the demands of justice.⁸ Also, we are not told that vengeance belongs to no one, but that the Lord declares “vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). In truth, forgiveness is not a one-time event but rather involves a long process of relinquishing vengeance into God’s hands, and this process will involve healthy anger. Most important of all, forgiveness does not mean forgetting or quickly moving on. The choice to forgive is the total prerogative—the “sovereign royal right”⁹—of the one who has been wronged and does not depend on the offender’s repentance nor means that the wrongdoer deserves to be trusted again or that there should be reconciliation (i.e., being trusted again with a new relationship).
- *If we prioritize allegiance to the gospel over safety for parishioners, we have misunderstood the gospel.* Safety should never be an inconvenience, and if it feels that way, then this simply reveals that we have confused our priorities. The safety of the members in our organization is always more important than our public image, our financial stability, or even our existence as a communion of saints. That is because we believe that a truly trinitarian and Christological ecclesiology will never be unethical or immoral according to God’s ultimate standards of righteousness. The church is the holy communion of those united to Christ the head and therefore partakers of God’s divine life, light, and love. In such a holy communion, it would be unthinkable for God’s design for human flourishing to involve endangering the safety of church members. Our care for the vulnerable, therefore, is a gauge for the robustness of our church’s life in God. Simply put, our theology of the church is just *too good not* to be trauma-safe.
- Moreover, the issue of trauma-safety is simply too important to become a casualty to current American political polarization. Trauma-informed care is not a new critical theory.¹⁰ It is not an issue of sexual ethics or the conservative-liberal divide. It is a basic issue of the human right to protection and flourishing within the family of God. For this reason, we have nothing to fear while implementing trauma-safety immediately, enthusiastically, and without reserve. As 1 John 4:18 says, *there is no fear in love*. If we love Christ and his gospel, we literally have nothing to lose while we listen to the wounded and safeguard the abused. As Luther once said at the dawn of the Reformation, “no one in Christendom has any authority to do harm, or to forbid others to prevent harm being done.”¹¹ We must not

⁷ Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable*; Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*; Jones, *Trauma and Grace*.

⁸ See Jacob and Rachael Denhollander, “Justice: The Foundation of a Christian Approach to Abuse,” in Preston Hill, ed. *Christ and Trauma: Theology East of Eden*.

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, “Sun of Righteousness, Arise!”

¹⁰ For more on the important distinction between trauma-informed care and critical theories such as deconstruction, see Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*.

¹¹ Luther, *Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.

fear Anglican social teaching for social justice reforms but should embrace the call of Christ to be his church *semper reformanda*.

- *Most people experience trauma, but not all are traumatized, and not all in the same way.* While 90% of Americans will experience a traumatic event in their lifetime, the prevalence of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is only 8%.¹² This is because trauma is a profoundly subjective experience. Two people can experience the exact same event and it can be traumatizing to one and not to the other.¹³ This should not surprise us, since no two people see the world in the exact same way in the first place. Much like beauty, trauma is in the eye of the beholder because it is a matter of experiencing a threat that overwhelms a particular individual's moral framework and regular coping capacities. However, this does not mean that posttraumatic stress is abnormal. *Trauma symptoms are completely normal and are a sign of strength, not weakness.* Posttraumatic stress needs to be blessed and honored because it shows us how we were able to survive extreme events. Survival is a gift from God because God preserves life. While posttraumatic stress inhibits flourishing, it demonstrates the strength of survival. The effects of trauma, including PTSD, are signposts for how our body, mind, and spirit have tried to make sense and keep us safe in the face of insensible evil.
- *Sexual abuse is about power, not sex.* While many people may believe that sexual predators are primarily motivated by a lustful desire for sexual gratification, this is not true. By and large, most perpetrators of sexual violence are driven by a desire to dominate the victim and derive pleasure from seeing the victim humiliated.¹⁴ As a result, we need to refocus our attention in this discussion away from sexual misconduct and more deeply into heart of the matter, which is the issue of abuse of power.
- Finally, and most important of all, *there is no trauma with which Christ is not intimately acquainted.* Of course, this does not mean that Christ necessarily experienced posttraumatic stress during his ministry and passion. What it does mean is that Jesus Christ, being fully divine and fully human, is God's pledge of allegiance that he has forever bound his divine identity as the eternal Son and Word with the fullness of human experience east of Eden to raise us back into fellowship with the Father by the Spirit. "He became what we are in order to make us what he himself is."¹⁵ By his identification with the least and vulnerable in the world for the salvation of humanity, Christ has determined the shape of all Christian social ethic according to the basic principle that *whatever we do to the least, we do to Christ, since Christ has become one with the least.* Jesus stands as judge before all perpetrators of violence because he stands shoulder-to-shoulder with their victims (Matthew 25). Just as "the body keeps the score" of trauma since survivors bear the wounds of violence in the integrated wholeness of mind, brain, and body, so also does Christ's body the church keep the score of trauma in the sense that all believers share their suffering in common by virtue of their union to Christ who empathizes with all our weakness and suffering (Heb. 4:15).¹⁶ Simply put, trauma is not an isolated issue for survivors alone. Trauma is a communal issue that belongs to us all as members of Christ and one another.
- From the foregoing, it follows that *if one member suffers, we all suffer (1 Cor 12:26).* Since there is no Christ apart from his church just as there is no head apart from the body (Eph. 5), the "whole Christ" (*totus Christus*) is Christ in union with his church and all its parts who are all similarly members of one another.

¹² Kirkpatrick et al., "National Estimates of Exposure to Traumatic Events"; DSM 5.

¹³ On this point, see Levine, *Waking the Tiger*.

¹⁴ On this, see Allender, *The Wounded Heart*, and *Healing the Wounded Heart*.

¹⁵ A ubiquitous adage from Athanasius, Irenaeus, Clement, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others. For more on this theme, see T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*.

¹⁶ Preston Hill, "Christ's Body Keeps the Score"; Hill, "When Jesus Doubted God."

er (Rom. 12:5).¹⁷ Therefore, when any one of us suffers, it is not we who suffer alone, but the whole company of Christ and his body.¹⁸

With these theological and psychological theses on trauma, abuse, and the church in mind, let us turn now to the principles and practices of a trauma-safe ministry or organization.

3. THE 4 PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA-SAFE MINISTRY: PLEB — PROTECTION, LISTENING, EMPOWERMENT, AND THE BODY

Trauma-safety is not an impossible ideal but is an attainable goal we can all begin implementing in our ministries today. Here we will sketch 4 guiding principles of a trauma-safe ministry or organization. To be sure, more can be added to this list, but we must recognize that no organization will be trauma-safe without these 4 basic principles to guide our social teaching and practice.¹⁹ The 4 principles can be easily remembered with the acronym PLEB: protection, listening, empowerment, and the body.

A. *Protection.* First, a trauma-safe organization is a Hippocratic organization. The Hippocratic oath is an ancient and basic guiding principle of biomedical ethics for medical care providers and licensed mental health professionals.²⁰ The rule is simple and intuitive: above all else, do no harm. If we are to create safe spaces, we must create spaces where no harm is done. A trauma-safe is an organization where those vulnerable to trauma are protected. An organization cannot be trauma-safe if it is a ministry where its members are being actively traumatized.

One of the biggest takeaways from this point is that *trauma-safe ministries never value the social image of the ministry above the safety of its members.* Whenever “moral failing” happens at the hands of our ministry leaders we must expose these horrors without condition, without apology, without timidity, and with all haste. “God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not know what is true” (1 John 1:5–6).²¹ If we claim to be the Church but we fail to act swiftly and publicly to bring the darkness to light when leaders are traumatizing members, we have made a false start in being the church. Trauma-safe ministries are never shy to bring darkness to light even when this may hurt the reputation or finances of our institutions. The safety of our members is always more important.

The defense that this might ruin our public witness to the world is no good reply either because “by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35) and this love is absent unless we act to help the vulnerable among us. “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?” (1 John 3:17). Caring for the safety of our members is our greatest witness to the world that God’s love abides with us. When trauma occurs in our communities, we must take swift action to publicly address the harm. We must not “keep it in the family” because only by *public* action to expose harm can we be a

¹⁷ On the *totus Christus*, see Augustine, Sermon. 341.1.

¹⁸ Luther, *Fourteen Consolations*.

¹⁹ For greater detail of this teaching on principles and practices of a trauma-safe church, see Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*.

²⁰ Beauchamp, *Standing on Principles; ACA Code of Ethics*.

²¹ For the importance of this point relevant to confessing sin of abuse, see St Augustine, *Sermon on Psalm 31*.

witness of God's love to the world. Trauma-safe ministries have nothing to hide and everything to gain by prioritizing safety to do no harm.²²

- B. *Listening*. Survivors need to tell their stories. Trauma healing cannot take place without some level of being able to tell one's story of harm and to have that story faithfully heard by a compassionate witness. This is the second criteria and principle of a trauma-safe organization; it is an organization that is not threatened to hear survivor stories but welcomes them and wants to witness harm with compassion. While this may be difficult for ministries heavily invested through social media in a pristine public image, it is imperative that we listen to the truth of harm. If our ministries are more committed to image than truth, then hearing accusations will feel like too high a price. However, it is not a price worth paying. Trauma-safe organizations always listen to survivors.

Trauma-safe organizations are places where survivors are free and invited to tell the truth of their harm. We can never learn to be trauma sensitive communities without being open to the testimony of survivors because we need these stories to learn what we don't know about the kinds of harm we haven't endured. For those who *have* experienced trauma we need a safe space where the healing available through bringing shame out of hiding can take place. Trauma-safe organizations offer a compassionate witness to trauma stories and trauma survivors by recognizing that *you cannot heal what you have not named*. "What is forgotten is unavailable, and what is unavailable cannot be healed."²³ To create communities that witness to God's works of healing, we must start by learning to listen to the trauma of our church members. A ministry that cannot name its own trauma cannot be a trauma-safe ministry.

Listening is done from a place of love and not fear—we meet the story with compassion rather than suspicion.²⁴ One of the biggest takeaways from the principle of listening to survivors and believing them is that *trauma-safe ministries never value the freedom of one person over the safety of another*. When a survivor reports harm we must not only listen and believe them but act accordingly. We must act with the assumption that the story is true *until we find out otherwise*. This ensures trauma safety. This does not mean that accusations against others are believed with no questions asked. But it does mean that accusations are always taken at face value. While it may be true in a court of law that people are innocent until proven guilty, this does not apply to our practices and procedures to protect the vulnerable.

If a survivor reports either past or ongoing trauma we listen, we believe, and we take decisive action to stop any *possible* ongoing harm *before we even have all the facts*. It is always better to be safe than sorry. For example, when someone shouts "Look out!" do we turn around with an unshielded face to see what the fuss is about? No. We crouch, cover our face, close our eyes, and brace for impact. Even if the person who shouted was mistaken, we are glad we covered up because *we would have been protected*. The same is true of listening to survivors and believing them. A compassionate witness not only invites survivor stories, not only believes them, but acts accordingly until all is well again.²⁵

- C. *Empowerment*. It is not enough to listen to trauma. We must take action of some sort to empower restoration. But whatever we do, we must do it *together*. Trauma-safe organizations do not sit idly by but follow the lead of survivors to try new practices that can alleviate posttraumatic stress by empowering

²² These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 156-160 of the book.

²³ Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*, 22.

²⁴ Some research demonstrates that the manner a survivor's disclosure is received can impact their healing and recovery. See Ullman and Peter-Hagene, "Social Reactions to Sexual Assault Disclosure," *Journal of Community Psychology*.

²⁵ These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 160-167 of the book.

survivors for the journey of healing. This is the third principle of a trauma-safe organization: it *does something* about the trauma of its members. And what is done encourages a mutually consented alliance between survivors and carers on how best to proceed. Trauma-safe organizations take “restorative action” that empowers survivors by doing something about the trauma together. “Restorative action” is a principle that means not doing something “for” someone but doing it “with” someone and is an internationally recognized method of peace-making and communal reconciliation.²⁶

Trauma-safe organizations do something *with* survivors, not *to* or *for* them. Anything less than a cooperative alliance like this will undermine survivor flourishing because of the nature of trauma itself. This is because the heart of all trauma is the experience of powerlessness in the face of threat and therefore the first step of all recovery needs to be restoring agency and empowerment for new action. Trauma shatters a person’s sense of self-worth and self-determination; recovery restores autonomy to the individual. To look with suspicion on survivors sends them the message that we think they are incapable, incompetent, and this only reinforces the stigmatized identity that is need of transformation. What is needed is for us to say, “I see you; I believe you. . .now, *how can I join you* in your journey of healing?”

One of the biggest takeaways from the third principle of a trauma-safe organization (empowering restoration with action) is that in these settings *survivors are safely invited to explore their healing and own it for themselves*. This restores dignity and autonomy and runs directly counter to the disempowering, stigmatizing experience of trauma.²⁷

- D. *The Body*. The last principle of a trauma-safe organizations must include something about the body because “safety always begins with the body.”²⁸ Trauma brings about a loss of bodily integrity for most survivors and this means that recovering safety must involve creating a space in which survivors can restore a sense of calm and regulation back to their bodies. If we are to create trauma-safe spaces, we must create organizations where the bodies of those among us are engaged in safety and blessed for the wounds and terrifying sensations that burden them daily.²⁹

This is the last principle of a trauma-safe organization; it does not ignore the body but incorporates physical practices to help survivors get moving again with others; this is done by blessing the fears we feel in our bodies and finding creative ways to restore safety. Where trauma has paralyzed bodies frozen in fear recovery invites fresh movement and offers kindness to the bodies of the traumatized. Trauma-safe organizations are not afraid of embodiment. Trauma-safe organizations help survivors to get moving again after trauma by encouraging survivors to engage and bless their bodies within the community.³⁰

4. PRACTICES FOR GETTING STARTED WITH TRAUMA-SAFETY

Where do we go from here? How can we get started with implementing trauma-safety in our organizations by following the above principles? Here, let us consider some simple practices that we can all implement in

²⁶ See Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable*.

²⁷ These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 169-174 of the book.

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 269.

²⁹ For more, see Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*; Rothschild, 8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery.

³⁰ These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 174-179 of the book.

our organizations today to make us more trauma-safe as God's people in his safe family.

- A. For protection, we can all get started with this principle by unapologetically, unambiguously, and unequivocally issuing, legislating, and standardizing a clear process of "mandatory reporting." This is an issue of baptismal identity, since in the sacrament of baptism we make a public vow as the church in the triune name to support and uphold the newly baptized in their progress and growth in Christlikeness. Trauma and sexual abuse inhibit the sanctification of the perpetrator and survivor alike and the sanctity of the confessional seal should never be used as an excuse to harbor secrecy that prevents illicit conduct from being brought into the public light of healing. Secrecy helps no one and harms many. We have nothing to fear and everything to gain by making policies and procedures open and public for the welfare of our communion in God's life, light, and love. Secure and righteous power is never afraid of accountability, even when that means submitting spiritual authority to civil authority in matters of public justice. We must be clear on our standards for mandatory reporting. We should post signs on our bathroom doors that adults are not allowed alone with children, and children in our church should always be overseen by the presence of at least two adults. This is not an issue of mistrust, but an issue of safety, and if we are inconvenienced by it, then we need to check our priorities.
- B. For listening, we should all take great care how we use the words "trauma" and "traumatize." Unfortunately, like with many psychopathologies, this word has become so commonplace that most people don't know exactly what they mean when they use it. We need to name trauma properly because you cannot heal what you have not named. Naming trauma properly allows us to honor survivors by affirming that the unique wounds they carry are unlike other more common forms of suffering. Trauma is a unique experience and ought to be properly named only when it occurs. It is not the same of depression, anxiety, being highly sensitive, or passing through mundane stressful events.

It is therefore inappropriate to say "that was so traumatic" in a passing manner if one is referring to an ordinary stressful event. Most people who misuse the term "trauma" do not have ill intent, but the effect is the same on survivors. Misusing the term only perpetuates the isolation, alienation, and shame that survivors feel. Even when we dishonor others by accident, we are still dishonoring them.³¹

This does not mean we should walk on eggshells and avoid naming trauma. It just means we need to take care to name trauma appropriately. We can take a huge step in our ministries today toward listening to survivors by stealing back the word "trauma" from its current sloppy usage in everyday jargon and reserving this as a term of honor for those who have survived unbearable violence. Changing how we speak will not be enough by itself, but it is a very important first step because it allows us to hear the real testimony of survivors with compassion by honoring the wounds they carry.³²

- C. For empowerment, we can create support groups for survivors where they are trusted to explore their own healing and we can invite survivors into positions of leadership, agency, and active ministry within our churches. Inviting survivors into active ministry in the ministry is empowering because it shows that surviving trauma does not preclude one's ability to minister in God's family. In fact, survivors often possess unique gifts and abilities from which we all can learn. Survivors have something to offer "us" just as much as we have something to offer "them." Splitting people into groups of "the wound-

³¹ Thomas Aquinas makes this point by saying that "reviling" others can be a "mortal sin" that "deserves the eternal punishment of hell" even when one "did not intend to dishonor the other." See *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2.72.2.

³² These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 185-188 of the book.

ed” and “the healers” is a false dichotomy. We are all broken, and we all have gifts to offer the church in our brokenness on the road to healing.

Inviting survivors into active ministry toward others lets them know that we do not see them as fundamentally flawed, broken, or incapable of good in the world. Rather, we see them as beautiful people with valuable gifts to offer. Survivors often feel branded by the violence they have suffered and carry a deeply stigmatized identity. It is our responsibility as the Church to bear witness that all people are created in the image of God and that nothing can destroy this image. The truth we must proclaim in word and deed is that trauma survivors are capable of brilliant glory, goodness, and service in God’s kingdom. To the extent that we resist integrating survivors in our ministries because their posttraumatic stress appears atypical to us, or we do not want to be “stained” by their suffering, we are participating in the kingdom of darkness. This perpetuates the stigma of trauma that survivors carry deep inside. Where trauma has stigmatized, we must empower restoration by telling survivors we value their contribution to our common church life.³³

- D. For the body, we can become trauma-safe by incorporating bodily practices that help empower survivors to break out of the fight-flight-freeze response and feel welcomed to be grounded in their bodies within the ministry of the church. Thankfully, we as Anglicans have a robust and historic liturgy which is designed to do exactly that. Through liturgy, we can direct our bodies in safe movement even when we don’t have the words to understand why we are feeling paralyzed. This can be a profound balm for trauma survivors. For example, the simple practice of making the sign of the cross can be a powerful tool to reinforce our common baptismal identity, our recognition that we share our sufferings in common in our one faith, and our affirmation that the triune God of cruciform love is a shield and protection over our whole mind, brain, and body as individuals in the safe communion of love.

Moreover, we can learn to press into the darker portions of Scripture and liturgy, and engage the neglected themes of lament, mourning, and penitence. Practices like these resonate with survivors and give them a communal language to bring the darkness of trauma into the healing light of recognition and communal embrace. Perhaps we can implement more robust Lenten and Holy Saturday services that explicitly engage themes of grief, loss, and justice for the abused.

Finally, we must all implement an immediate practice in our organizations that is key for trauma-safety: always ask before touching. Surviving trauma often leaves a deeply embodied startle-response that is hypervigilant and sensitive to unanticipated touch. This can be especially triggering during portions of the liturgy such as passing the peace. We would help countless survivors suffering in silence in our midst if we learned to always ask and never presume the closeness of touch in any form unless this touch has been invited by the recipient. This practice can also protect against the subtle practice of grooming by which many perpetrators become physically familiar with victims to bind them into secrecy and silence. We can all become more trauma-safe today by practicing this basic rule. Always ask before touching.³⁴

³³ These themes are taken from Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*. For more detail, see p. 188-194 of the book.

³⁴ For more on these points, see Cockayne, Harrower, Hill, *Dawn of Sunday*, p. 194-202.

CONCLUSION

We live in a world that is east of Eden and west of New Jerusalem; between the now and the not yet; between death and resurrection; between the silence of Holy Saturday and the breaking dawn of Easter Sunday. In this sacred space, we must learn to minister with the bold kindness of God to the wounds from trauma and sexual abuse that remain with us lifelong. In this process, we can learn to become churches, ministries, and organizations that are safe for the traumatized and all of us who are vulnerable to trauma. Through the gospel of Christ and his bride the church, we can all become trauma-safe starting now. Nothing less is worthy of the gospel.

*⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?”*

*⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”*

*⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

*⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’*

*If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,*

*¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.*

*¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.*

*¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

ISAIAH 58:6-12



**MATTHEW 25
INITIATIVE**