

**A Liturgical Resource  
for Addressing Experiences of Abuse  
in the Church**

**Background**

Stories of abuse claim more publicity by the day . The Church has had its own part in them, and this is hard to face. Yet not to face our involvement paralyses us. The Anglican Church's Tikanga Pakeha Liturgical Working Group regularly reviews issues that preoccupy ministry units nationally. This resource arises from that review process. It is intended for use by communities of faith. It is not intended to replace existing liturgies for individuals suffering abuse. We do not assume that those participating in this liturgy need to have been directly involved in the original circumstances of the abuse. Abuse - physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual, spiritual - particularly by men or women, where power is used coercively, affects not only the victim and the perpetrator, but also their families, friends and communities. Thereby the whole church is affected. The damage done needs to be named, owned and worked through, before the church and all those affected can move on to a future based on reconciliation, healing and new life. This resource is an invitation to the Church at diocesan, regional or local level to address abusive experiences within its life. As a Tikanga Pakeha Church, we have claimed much for the partnership of women and men, both lay and ordained. Yet we find that partnership has often been subject to abuse. To minimise such stories and generalise about them is unhelpful. Below we set out a series of steps on which to build a liturgy . Invitations to take part need to be carefully worded and distributed and a full text of the liturgy in printed form should be distributed to all those participating.

### **Using This Resource**

This liturgy needs to be developed for use as often as required. We acknowledge that it may take several efforts with different groups over a period of time to find the way ahead. Not all affected by the abuse may be able to attend the event immediately, but this should not prevent the liturgical process getting under way.

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It is not helpful to try to address several forms of abuse within the same liturgy. We hope that this liturgy may be considered a paradigm for addressing many different forms of abuse within the church, in particular child abuse and paedophilia, abuse of the elderly, discrimination & abuse in employment relationships and ministry opportunities.

This resource acknowledges the ongoing and unfinished nature of the process. We are not assuming that all will come to a place of healing or resolution in this liturgy.

### **Liturgical Steps**

Negotiating ownership. We begin by saying why we are here. A brief summary of the story that brings us together should be well prepared before hand, if possible sent out as part of the invitation to the liturgy, and read clearly and simply without elaboration at the beginning. We acknowledge that this is the church gathering, and acknowledge all those who have been affected by the abuse .

## **Lament**

The goal of this section is to help us towards a God-directed perspective, and to express our emotions before God. It is expressing to God our lack of faith that gives rise to our involvement in broken relationships, people, bodies, our inability to protect. We are including some resources in the Appendix e.g. poetry, Psalms. This section may involve the expression of guilt, shame, the confession of the church's complicity.

*This Lament is written in the spirit of the biblical laments – of the men and women in scriptures who have trusted God enough to complain, to rail against the circumstances of their lives, and who have dared to express unremitting grief. A lament is not a confession but a liturgical dialogue with God. As such it is ultimately a declaration of faith and may become a source of community healing and growth.*

Open our lips O God

**And our mouths will proclaim your praise**

It is difficult to praise you God  
when we are faced with the realities  
of hurt and conflict  
and all the division they bring  
within us  
within the community  
within our hearts

We gather in your name  
but it is hard to say holy  
when so much that is unholy  
has taken place;  
some were left wondering  
and some are left wondering still  
where were you then?

*a time of silent reflection*

Yet we trust that you are with us now  
and say let our cry come to you

**Let our cry come to you**

Perhaps we did not cry loud enough  
Some of us did not know that it was time to cry  
and some of us lacked the courage  
to let our cries come to you  
and some cry still '*my God why have you forsaken me?*'

*a time for silent reflection*

Yet we know that you are with us  
That you are our God,

**You are God, our Emmanuel, God with us**

Into your presence we have come

In your presence we trust

and ask for open hearts

hearts that will acknowledge suffering

hurt, lack of care, lost faith,

and hearts that will live humbly

in the love which you give to us still

in your peace which you leave with us still

in your hope that restores and strengthens

all who put their trust in you

*a time of silent reflection*

You are our God

**We hold before you the doubts and the conflicts**

You are our God

**We give you the disbeliefs and the confusions**

You are our God

**We ask you to hear the anger and the loss of heart**

You are our God

**We offer our frail faith and our deepest longings**

You are our God

**We look to you**

You are our God

**lead us to life**

**lead us to life**

### **Symbolic Action**

We keep a time of silence for personal reflection. A symbolic action may follow, which may be explained verbally or in the service sheet. People may be invited to make use of symbols, such as stones, candles, water, flowers, greenery, fire, words. In silence or with music.

### **Intercession**

We pray for the church: that it may be honest and compassionate, that we may act justly and protect those who are vulnerable. We offer prayer for all those involved. We pray for the healing of the church, the world, creation, and for ourselves. See Appendix for examples.

### **Acknowledging God' s Grace**

Here our focus is on being open to the transformation of grace, and the possibility of moving on. This may involve a quiet time of music, silence, reading(s), some comforting Scripture and the Gospel message of hope.

The liturgy ends with a blessing of peace said together. The liturgy should end in an open-ended fashion, with opportunity for those who wish to linger to do so, and people are free to leave when they are ready.

### **Afterword**

It is important that at the end of the service sheet, further steps that people could take following this service are named - e.g. availability of people to talk with in confidence, the NZ Prayer Book service of reconciliation, opportunities for spiritual direction, a repeat or variation of the liturgy.

### **Appendix**

Here are some models of prayers and resources, all of which need to be adapted, but may give you a starting point.

- \* Prayer from United Church of Canada - prayer for 1st nations;
- \* suitably adapted prayers from Liturgy for Survivors of Abuse;
- \* Prayer of St Francis;
- \* NZ Prayer Book: p.458 Confession, p.162, 163 Litany, p.168, p.74