

Church-based Care stream

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Church 'leaders' stream

Focus: leadership decisions that can help a church to care well for those affected by trauma

Format: discussion and feedback

Discussion #1

Many 'needs' could influence the way we do church (eg low reading ability; sensitivity to loud noises; wheelchair users; deafness; visual impairment)

- What is a pastor to do?
- Some argue that 'past trauma' has a particularly strong claim. Do you agree?

Discussion #2: Trauma & welcoming

For 6 years as a teenager, Linda was in a controlling and coercive relationship with a church minister. He physically and sexually abused her and is now serving a custodial sentence. Now in her mid 20s, Linda is making her first attempt to return to church. She has contacted the church office and explained her situation.

- How will you proceed?
- What do you think might be helpful to Linda?
- What attitudes in yourself might you need to be aware of?

Trauma and welcoming

- Attitudes matter:
 - Suspicion?
 - Reluctance?
 - Fear?
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- Talking with a pastor, Linda is likely to be afraid and also sensitive to others finding her annoying / irritating / too difficult

Trauma and welcoming

- When you know that trauma is an issue
 - Initial conversations – (away from church building?)
 - Communicating welcome and flexibility
 - Listening and making time
 - Anticipating slow progress
 - Identifying people who can offer consistent support

Trauma and welcoming

- More often we don't know trauma is an issue
 - The busy-ness of your entrance
 - Clear sight of exits
 - Giving time and space
 - Tolerating unusual requests (eg to sit at the back; to be in a quiet room)
 - Tolerating unusual behaviour (eg arriving late; leaving and returning during a service)
 - Offering training and support to your welcome team

Trauma and preaching

- The experience of a flashback
- The concept of ‘triggering’

Discussion #3: Trauma and preaching

You are working your way through 2 Samuel. Next week you will arrive at chapter 13, the account of Tamar being raped by her half brother Amnon.

Is there anything you could / should do differently?

Trauma and preaching

Making avoidance possible

- Advance notice about the reading / subject matter the week before
- Highlight reading / subject matter at the start of the service
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- Acknowledging such sensitivities is important (it says 'we see you')

Trauma and preaching

In the sermon itself

- Acknowledge the sensitivity
- Follow the Bible's lead
- Seek advice from women
- Check sensitive sections of your sermon beforehand
- Avoid humour that tries to 'lighten the mood'

Trauma and forgiveness

The importance of forgiveness

- a biblical mandate – Ephesians 4:32

But care lest we get to forgiveness too quickly



Trauma and forgiveness

- The practice of lament
- The importance of 'witnessing'

Calvin on the psalms 'God is the witness of our afflictions'
*But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless. (Psalm 10:14)*

Leading and trauma

- Isolation & shame are prominent in trauma
- Those who have experienced trauma often feel unseen and unheard ('unspeakably awful')

Exhortations to forgive and not hold on to resentment can be disorientating for those who have suffered abusive treatment

Discussion #4: Leading and trauma

- What could we do in the life of the church that would help those who have experienced trauma to feel 'seen'?
- How should we speak about 'the need to forgive'?
- Responding to the question: 'is this church trauma aware?'
- Responding when strong emotions are affecting those nearby?

- Making mention of trauma in sermons
- Warning about potentially distressing readings
- Qualifying our references to 'the need to forgive' by acknowledging situations where this is not so simple
- Pastoral training that includes reference to trauma
- Extending references to 'suffering' so they include the language of 'trauma'
- Leaflets / books about trauma

Q&A

Top questions

Pinned

Newest

Oldest

Answered

There are no unanswered questions.

