



COFFEE & CONVERSATION

Talking about Safety & the Church as a Sanctuary
October 9, 2018



Questions for Discussion:

What does it mean to say that the Church (our church) is a safe place?

How should the Church (our church) be one?

Does safety have to do primarily with aspects that are emotional?; physical?; spiritual?; and/or sexual?

Is “safety” a Christian notion, rooted in the affirmations of the First Testament and the person of Jesus of Nazareth?

Does “safety” mean something different for different people?; such as youth, children, women, of color, homeless folks, white men, LGBTQI people, clergy, the poor, the rich, agnostics who might be involved in the life of our community?

Should Church be a place of healing for survivors? How so? What might that look like?

How much would you be willing to give up in order to ensure the safety of others?



Reading for Reflective Discussion:

Some Citations of Scripture regarding Safety

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear,...” Psalm 46:1-2

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1

⁵ Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

⁶ With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals.” Psalm 118

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
Matthew 10:34

Article on Child Sexual Abuse

<< The statistics of child sexual abuse are startling to say the least.

The Russell Study **revealed that up to 38% of women were molested before turning 18 years old**. This same study found that **up to 16% of boys are molested before they turn 18 years old**. Dr. Russell also discovered that only 5% of child sexual abuse had been reported to law enforcement.

If approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men have been sexually abuse as children (an even a more conservative statistic than that provided by Dr. Russell), ***this means that our churches are filled with abuse survivors***. For example, a church of 200 members (100 women and 100 men) will have at least 41 child sexual abuse survivors...20.5% Yet, ***sexual abuse is still too seldom talked about inside our churches. How would your church respond if:***

- ***20.5% of the congregation had cancer; or***
- ***20.5% of the congregation had lost a child; or***
- ***20.5% of the congregation had been fired from employment?***

Is it safe to predict that addressing this issue would become a primary focus of the church ministry? Is it safe to predict that pastors would preach sermons addressing the spiritual issues associated with trauma? Is it safe to predict that church members would expend themselves in love and service to those experiencing such deep hurt? Is it safe to predict that the church would not respond to this criminal offense in silence? As a faith community, we must learn to approach the horror of child sexual abuse no differently. Perhaps these statistics can help drive our faith communities to become places of refuge and healing for abuse survivors who are silently suffering in our midst.

...

Most children never report sexual abuse, and when they do, it is often ignored. A young girl in Memphis can sadly attest to this appalling truth. Perhaps these statistics will prompt our faith communities to actively educate our members about this crime, and to dialogue openly about these issues with our children. Two key components of such education are prevention and response. Churches must seek the advice, counsel and training of child protection experts to assist in developing a 'culture of protection'. Responding with excellence to abuse disclosures should always involve reporting the alleged crime to law enforcement, as well as demonstrating affirmation and support to the child who has come forward. Such an environment will make it much more likely that a victim will come forward, the abuse will stop, and the perpetrator will face justice. I will address the issues of prevention and response in much greater detail during the coming weeks and months. Perhaps these statistics can encourage our faith communities to spend more time listening and learning.

Understanding the reality of these disturbing statistics is one of the first steps in transforming our faith communities into places where children are safe and abuse survivors are welcomed, valued, and loved. Perhaps a better understanding of these disturbing statistics would have prompted at least one church member in Memphis to step forward to love and protect a 16-year-old child by reporting her abuser to the police. Now that would have been an answer to prayer. >>

*An excerpt from an article by Boz Tchividjian (the 3rd-eldest grandchild of the Rev. Billy Graham)
1/9/2014 Find it online at <https://religionnews.com/2014/01/09/startling-statistics/>*

*The Russell Study is: The Epidemic of Rape and Child Sexual Abuse in the United States, © 2000
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