



# God's Justice: Just Relationships between Women and Men, Girls and Boys

Study Materials for use by Theological  
Colleges, Seminaries and Training Schemes in  
the Anglican Communion



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*Bible references in these study materials are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

*Cover page image courtesy of Side by Side Ghana [www.sidebysidegender.org](http://www.sidebysidegender.org)*

*A document signposting publications and other resources to accompany these study materials is online at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/women-gender-justice/tools-for-transformation.aspx>.*

# Introduction

These materials are offered to theological colleges, seminaries and training programmes as a component or module which can be incorporated into existing curricula and training schemes for women and men who are preparing for lay or ordained ministry, or who are continuing to develop their ministerial education.

Theologians from six continents have made contributions to these notes. Their reflections invite critique and conversation that is best undertaken within a respectful, theological community. It will be important to explore and contextualise the language and terminology used as part of the learning process.

In scripture, the story of God and humankind is a story of relationship and longing for relationship: God's costly seeking of relationship with us; our seeking of relationship with God; our relationship with one another.

The quality of our relationship with one another is seen as intrinsically connected to the quality of our relationship with God. Walking humbly with God is spoken in the same breath as doing justice and loving kindness.

Just relationships between women and men, girls and boys are fundamental to human flourishing – the abundant life that God wills for all God's children.

However, in our churches and communities around the world we are falling short of this Gospel imperative. Gendered attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes and expectations can shape negative behaviours and impose burdens on all of us, especially when it comes to power - who has power and how power is used.

Unequal power relations between women and men, whether among individuals or embedded in social, economic, religious and political structures, can have deeply harmful consequences. Women and girls, men and boys may become trapped in distorted mythologies and theologies, to their own detriment and to the detriment of families, communities and nations. Women and girls may be systematically disadvantaged and oppressed across every sphere of life.

Gender-based violence is an endemic manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men, girls and boys and is perpetrated across a variety of settings, from domestic to educational and in times of war and political unrest.

In 2017, #MeToo went viral on social media, beginning in North America and quickly spreading to other parts of the world. This soon became a global movement, gathering a variety of alternative hashtags as it travelled such as #BelieveSurvivors, #ChurchToo, #MyDressMyChoice, #TimesUp and #HeForShe. It revealed the magnitude of the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, not least in our churches and places of work.

#MeToo emerged as a new movement but harmful patterns of patriarchy and also of misogyny (a system operating within a patriarchal social order to 'police' and enforce women's subordination and uphold male dominance) are centuries old in many of our cultures and need to be held to the light of God's indiscriminate and redemptive love.

Research undertaken by the World Health Organization has shown that worldwide one in three women experience physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup> Family members perpetrate around 5,000 so-called honour killings of women each year.<sup>2</sup> Femicide, the gender-based killing of women, has been a rising phenomenon in Latin America with women's bodies ending up in rubbish dumps and ditches. Women and girls make up 71 per cent of the world's human trafficking victims.<sup>3</sup> The UN Population Fund suggests that more than 163 million women are missing from Asia's population through sex-selective abortion, infanticide, or other means.

Every day, 38,000 girls are coerced into early marriage<sup>4</sup> and are more likely to become pregnant before their bodies are sufficiently mature for safe delivery of their babies. In fact, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second highest cause of death for 15 to 19 year-old girls globally.<sup>5</sup> Female genital mutilation affects more than 125 million girls and women alive today.<sup>6</sup>

Sexual violence is perpetrated against women and girls during times of war and conflict by a broad range of perpetrators, from militias and government soldiers to peacekeeping forces, as a means of exerting power and control. Conflicts exacerbate gender inequalities and gender-based violence, and these become 'normal' and persist long after the signing of peace agreements. Even so, between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2 per cent of mediators, 8 per cent of negotiators, and 5 per cent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes.<sup>7</sup> Only a tiny per cent of hundreds of peace treaties drafted over the last 20 years contain specific references to women.<sup>8</sup>

The global cost of violence against women and its impact on development, economies and health, is huge. Its impact on individual human lives is incalculable.

Rigid gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles also affect men and boys who may find it difficult to live up to expectations, not least in circumstances of conflict, economic instability and displacement. Men and boys who are subject to social pressure to conform to dominant forms of masculinity may feel bound to display aggressive and violent behaviour whilst restraining any show of vulnerable emotions. Such behaviour has the effect of marginalising other men and boys, as well as women and girls.

Whilst not as prevalent, sexual and gender-based violence is also committed against men and boys, and the resulting stigma attached to being a male survivor of such violence is as damaging as it is for a female survivor.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, 2014

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Population Fund

<sup>3</sup> UNODC

<sup>4</sup> Plan International, 2014

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation, 2014

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation, 2014

<sup>7</sup> UN Women and the Council on Foreign Relations (5 January 2018). Women's Participation in Peace Processes, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes>

<sup>8</sup> 'Gender and Peacebuilding: Why women's involvement in peacebuilding matters', Kathleen Kuehnast, 2015, <http://www.buildingpeace.org/think-global-conflict/issues/gender-and-peacebuilding>

People of faith have often been at the forefront of maintaining the status quo, and even of reinforcing stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity that prepare the ground for gender-based violence and other gender injustices, and more broadly inhibit human flourishing. We have even been complicit in the stigmatising of victims/survivors of gender-based violence and failed to make safe space in our places of worship where they can find welcome, a sense of belonging, and healing.

However, church leaders and Christian pastors and ministers at all levels, if adequately sensitised and equipped, have the potential to play an enormous role in transformation for gender justice.

People listen to their church leaders and expect moral guidance from them. Clergy and lay ministers know their people and their local culture, and are in an authoritative position to question biblical interpretations and cultural traditions and practices that do harm by burdening or diminishing women and girls, men and boys.

The Bible is not monovocal; this is evident in its diverse and sometimes ambivalent portrayal of relationships between women and men. Yet in the Old Testament there is an early and clear understanding of women and men being equally made in the divine image (Genesis 1.27), and this is echoed by Paul in the New Testament within the context of our baptismal vocation (Galatians 3.27-28).

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus' ministry and teaching offer a radical reformulation of traditional male and female norms and values. There is much to explore deeply and to value as we seek positive leadership models and relationships that reflect healing, reconciliation and abundant life.

Church leaders and preachers can promote Jesus-shaped life, expounding biblical texts that are liberative and redemptive for women and men, and Christian values and beliefs that promote safety, autonomy and respect. They can lift up the points of harmony between the values of our faith and the best of our cultural heritage.

The training, formation and equipping of church leaders and ministers in this area are therefore essential as they prepare to show and tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Sacrament and Word and in the lives they live.

The faithful, informed and intentional journey towards gender just relationships and gender equality takes us to the point where we are willing and confident enough to make space for each other. In the great dance of life we are called to move our feet constantly to make room for the feet of others so that they too can fully participate in God's good creation.

To reflect before God on gender ... is to think about what it means that we are male and female. It is to ask what it would mean to experience our being gendered as gift rather than danger, a source of life and hope rather than oppression or fear, as something to be received gratefully from God, rather than experienced as a source of strife.

*Susan Durber, 'Of the Same Flesh: Exploring a theology of gender' Christian Aid 2014*

Within the worldwide Church, there have already been significant moves to break the stranglehold of patriarchal and distorted mythologies around power, and raise awareness and foster commitment to this journey.

For example, 'building just communities of women and men' is a priority in all activities of the World Council of Churches as it continues to invite Christians everywhere to join in a pilgrimage of justice and peace. It is recognised that the experiences, perspectives and participation both of women and men are equally needed for the transforming renewal of church and society, and that just gender relations are essential as we respond to climate change, build an economy of life, and promote just peace and human dignity.

There are clear signs within the Anglican Communion that churches at grassroots and leadership levels have begun challenging prevailing narratives on gendered power relationships and are actively lifting up gender justice as integral to ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to reach their God-given potential.

## A growing momentum in the Anglican Communion

Many local churches and Anglican groups are using ecumenical and grassroots campaigns and other opportunities to raise awareness of gender-based violence and the broader issues of gender injustice. They hold Services and prayer vigils, run workshops, Bible studies and street theatre, and join with others in their communities for joint advocacy and action. Such campaigns and opportunities include the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (25 November to 10 December), the Thursdays in Black campaign against sexual violence, International Women's Day and the White Ribbon campaign (a movement of men and boys for gender justice).

'Male and female, we are created equally by God in God's image. Our Lord Jesus Christ saved us equally on the cross. How can we say we are saved if our women and children are not safe? Violence against women and children is not the Way of Christ. It is a sin. Jesus calls us to love one another. Our communities of faith must stand together and resist violence against women and children in our community and in our home.'

*Archbishop Winston Halapua, Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand & Polynesia, during the 16 Days of Activism 2016<sup>9</sup>*

A growing number of Anglicans and ecumenical partners are coming together locally to work together as part of the international, locally-led Side by Side faith movement for gender justice.<sup>10</sup>

During the 2008 Lambeth Conference, the bishops and their spouses held a joint session called 'Equal in God's sight: When Power is Abused' to discuss the abuse of power and violence against women. The Indaba Reflections document that emerged from Lambeth 2008 referred to gender-based violence within the church and reflected that the violence meted out to

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<sup>9</sup> <http://bit.ly/2UqKwdB>

<sup>10</sup> [www.sidebysidegender.org](http://www.sidebysidegender.org)

women and children within the body of Christ is violence done to the body of Christ. The document also noted that the role of the Bishops is to enable communities of faith to be agents of transformation and reconciliation.<sup>11</sup>

In January 2011 the Primates' Letter to the Churches following their meeting in Dublin included a strong commitment to 'attend to the training of clergy and pastors so that they are aware of the nature and dynamics of gendered violence and how certain attitudes and behaviours can be challenged and transformed.'

In 2013, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) passed a resolution requesting all member churches to work towards the realisation of Millennium Development Goal 3 'Promote gender equality and empower women'<sup>12</sup> in their own structures of governance, and in other bodies to which they nominate or appoint.<sup>13</sup> This request was revisited in resolutions 14.33<sup>14</sup> and 15.07<sup>15</sup> in subsequent ACC meetings.

ACC resolution 15.07 also recommended that theological colleges and training schemes in the Anglican Communion 'ensure that curricula include at least one component designed to train all clergy and other ministers concerning:

- the nature and dynamics of gendered and domestic violence
- how positive attitudes and behaviours among women, men, girls and boys can be encouraged and affirmed
- awareness of the indicators often present in situations involving trafficking of girls and boys, women and men for sexual purposes and exploitative labour, and
- the scriptural and theological basis underpinning the work of eliminating gender-based and domestic violence'.

In 2016, ACC resolutions 16.02 on Women and Men in Church and Society<sup>16</sup> and 16.03 on Gender Equality and Justice<sup>17</sup> emphasised the importance of responses to the broader and embedded presence and experience of gender injustice.

Commitments and resolutions such as these are important but good intentions *need to turn into lived realities* – in our churches and their structures, in the families and communities we reach, and in broader structures which may systematically disadvantage and oppress women and girls across every sphere of life, and which may compound a sense of entitlement among men and boys.

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<sup>11</sup> Lambeth Indaba, Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2009: Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity. August 2008. English: <http://bit.ly/2GfCwmW>, Spanish: <http://bit.ly/2UrPal6>

<sup>12</sup> The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000 – 2015 were superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015 – 2030. These include SDG 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. A number of other SDGs include gender targets. See <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>13</sup> ACC resolution 13.31, see <http://bit.ly/2vNRD1p>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://bit.ly/2wdlUG2>

<sup>15</sup> See <http://bit.ly/2jr7v5O>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://bit.ly/1Wj8VeY>

<sup>17</sup> See <http://bit.ly/2MXBo8c>



The Anglican Communion is committed to putting holistic mission into practice, as expressed in its Five Marks of Mission. Gender injustice affects so many of its members and the communities it serves that working for transformation is urgent and unavoidable. This work will have to be undertaken in varied and wide-ranging ways. The final session in this study resource makes a range of suggestions, using the Five Marks as a framework for action.

## The aims of a programme of study

The following are suggested aims for a programme of study based on these study materials.

- To educate and assist in the holistic formation of clergy and other ministers through deepening scriptural and theological understandings of:
  - why human beings, women and men, girls and boys, have equal value and innate dignity
  - the implications of this for the sharing of power, knowledge and resources, and for freedom from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression
  - why gender-based and domestic violence is a sinful perversion of our response to God's reconciling love for all people, and is therefore unacceptable, inexcusable and intolerable.
- To encourage participants to explore the topic individually and collaboratively, and, in a safe environment, to allow the topic to interrogate their past, present and future life and ministry in a theologically informed way.

## Learning objectives

A programme of study will increase the participants' ability to:

- understand and value God-given human equality and dignity
- articulate some scriptural and theological foundation for just power relationships between women and men, girls and boys, in the Anglican Communion and beyond
- understand just gender relationships as integral to Christian discipleship and Jesus-shaped life
- select biblical texts on themes relevant to the topic and to the contextual concerns of the participants' communities, and explore and interpret them critically using the techniques of 'Contextual Bible Study', and respecting God-given equality and dignity for women and men
- identify the Gospels' teaching of redemption and equality for women and men, and interpret them theologically and pastorally with others
- recognise how cultures imbued with patriarchal values have led to misunderstanding and misapplication of biblical principles, leading to the devaluation of women and girls and the 'divine' legitimisation of such devaluation
- understand some of the causes of gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation, why they are morally wrong, and seek ways of ending and preventing them
- understand that the active participation of victims/survivors of gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation is essential, since their lived experience informs theological work in this area



- acknowledge the responsibility of church leaders in perpetrating gender injustice and in silencing those who would speak out, and recognise the positive and vital role of church leaders in:
  - challenging harmful attitudes and cultural practices, ending and preventing gender-based violence, abuse and disrespectful treatment of women and girls, as well as men and boys
  - preaching and promoting the benefits of, and modelling, mutually supportive relationships characterised by the values of Christian faith
- reflect on personal attitudes toward manhood, womanhood and human equality in the light of God's will, shown in the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ, and to understand differing ways in which they can be expressed.

## Expected outcomes

Those teaching in particular academic or local settings will want to develop specific expectations or requirements for having successfully completed a programme of study, and establish criteria for the evaluation of a participant's work. Common overall expectations or requirements might include:

- active participation in the programme of study
- active contribution to small group and plenary sessions
- scriptural and theological reflection on the content of the programme of study
- development of tangible pastoral tools or resources for use in the student's own context, including Bible study materials
- evidence of understanding and skill development as set out in the Learning Objectives
- movement from faith to action.

# Section 1: Creating the learning environment

## Aims

- To learn how to create a safe space.
- To acknowledge the importance of individual learning and respectful dialogue in community.
- To value the local context and culture.

Then God said: 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'

*Exodus 3.5*

## Creating safe space

Establishing a safe space within the learning environment is a high priority, especially when relationships between women and men, girls and boys are both the content and context.

If God asked Moses to remove his sandals while standing on holy ground, we are also encouraged to 'take off our shoes' when approaching someone else's sacred space, especially when speaking with survivors of domestic violence or rape, those with HIV/AIDS, and others who need to know they are safe.

Respect and a willingness to listen and understand each other are essential in every attempt to create safe and sacred space. Radical openness, humility and acceptance will enable each person to feel confident enough to bare their soul to God or to a listener.

Being marginalised over a long period of time renders women vulnerable and afraid to speak out. Patience and respect are necessary if a listener is committed to learning from the perspective of those who are, or have been marginalised.

There is a risk in encouraging respectful dialogue. If the space is tarnished or broken by even one person's impatience, distrust, or condescending or judgmental attitude, then those who have been silenced in the past will be further silenced.

The safety of all participants should always be the key priority. In some contexts this may mean that women and men, at least for some of the time, should have separate teaching and discussion forums in order for safety to be maintained, especially for women. There are examples in church circles across the world, where women have been severely reprimanded by their husbands for speaking out in a public forum, especially if she has said something that he does not agree with. It is therefore vital to be aware of the power dynamics between men and women when considering the creation of safe space for dialogue and learning.

In creating a safe learning environment, teachers need also to be aware of the power dynamics that exist between the teacher and the students. It is helpful to name and clarify the various roles and relationships that exist in the room.

Power relationships exist in most communities and so, in order to enable respectful dialogue, there needs to be a negotiated understanding of confidentiality – of what can and cannot be shared beyond the group process. This may require the group to come up with its own rules and expectations of one another, and a check-list of how respect is exercised.

Information shared may negatively affect a member or members of the group, for example, evoking painful memories. This will have relational and pastoral implications and so it is useful to consider this possibility ahead of time and plan for follow-up where necessary, perhaps nominating a chaplain for the group.

In order that participants fully engage, each needs to be clear about the intentions and desired outcomes of the learning environment. This is the responsibility of the teacher but again it can be part of the initial group-building process – where the group as a collective establishes the rules of engagement and the intentions of the session. When participants know what is expected of them and have ‘owned’ the learning environment, there is a deeper sense of security and greater commitment.

## **The importance of individual learning and respectful dialogue in community**

Setting up and establishing a safe learning environment that is respectful to all participants takes into account individual differences including gender, culture, age, social status, education, etc. Such an environment is vital when discussing *all* issues, but especially issues concerned with gender-based biases and violence. Being respectful means valuing the other person’s humanity rather than personality, and honouring others regardless of what they believe, or do, or what they look like, or where they live. When discussing gender, and more specifically power dynamics between women and men, girls and boys, respectful conversation is essential.

In most communities or groups, male experiences are still considered the ‘norm’ for all humanity. This is a distortion, particularly in our churches where, on average, women represent more than half the membership. When their voices are not heard and their contributions not appreciated or taken seriously, the church is impoverished and women are demoralised. All perspectives have value and should be heard and respected.

An understanding of diverse learning preferences will assist in enabling a learning environment where different perspectives are positively embraced. Individuals and cultural groups have different learning styles, and therefore it is important to embrace a variety of teaching tools and methods. For example, some individuals will appreciate a lecture style approach, but many will prefer learning by engaging in discussions within a group setting. Some will enjoy reading material that is provided ahead of the teaching session, while others will learn more easily from viewing video material or having one-to-one conversations in order to go deeper into the subject. Tools such as PowerPoint presentations and handouts; case studies; opportunities to dramatise stories and sing their songs; and allowing informal group-building, are all part of what could be considered when setting the scene for learning that is intentional about all participants fully engaging.

Openness to listening to each other's stories is a very important component of the teaching and learning process. Listening is a systemically unequal, gendered activity, and this needs to be acknowledged and overcome.

Listening involves not just hearing the spoken word, but engaging with those who are silenced, including where feelings and memories are evoked among those in the group who have experienced gender-based violence and abuse. Participants can be encouraged to express themselves using diverse forms of communication such as art, poetry, drama, song, etc.

## Valuing local context and culture

The role of the storyteller is never an objective one, for what is told will be coloured and imaged in words (and symbols) that reflect the teller's own internal and external story.

*Rosemary Russell, from 'The journey is hope: one pakeha woman's exploration of a theology of liberation'. Auckland: The Women's Resource Centre, 1997.*

Aside from creating a safe space, it is important to take seriously the local context and culture of the learners or storytellers. Local context can be interpreted as how and where a person lives and engages in their story, in their time, with their people and the environment; in other words, in their place. It is about naming and owning identity, which is often with reference from within a local cultural setting rather than a global one. Therefore, the local context is the most effective place to address just relationships. Too often other nations or peoples have told the local people what they should think and do. Relationships are transformed through people communicating deeply with one another, rather than being critiqued or judged by other groups or cultures.

The biblical imperative is that God's justice includes all people; '... there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28).

Taking account of local context and culture alongside the biblical imperative for safe and just relationships for women and men, girls and boys raises an interesting dichotomy. On the one hand, there are gender roles that can be encouraged and celebrated. On the other hand, there are gender roles that need to be challenged. This is not an easy task, especially in areas where some gender roles are harmful or enslaving and so the need arises to deconstruct some of them. Even if these roles have existed and have been accepted as normal for many years in a specific context or culture, they need to be challenged through education and sharing so that roles are fair, just and life-giving.

Every culture and context has work to do on gender roles, and so no one culture and context can offer itself as superior when it comes to working on just relationships. In a global church environment there is a temptation to tell each other what to do across the nations and provinces. There is certainly value in resource-sharing and the telling of stories across cultural entities. Transformation happens when each cultural group is given the resources and power to create places and spaces for respectful dialogue in their own way and using their own symbols, language and contextual analysis.

The connecting and potentially liberating gift that we have in common across the Anglican Communion is the Bible. The reading and interpretation of scripture is a continuing journey. Offering diverse resources on how to interpret texts, particularly concerning the roles and status of women and men, girls and boys in the church and wider society, will assist learning and respectful dialogue.

These study materials are designed to offer every context and culture a tool to contribute towards organising safe places to have sometimes difficult conversations about relationships between women and men. This should be done alongside biblical hermeneutics, but in order to be transformative it needs to be in the right place, at the right time, and taking into account culture and context.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. How would you create a safe learning environment to engage in scriptural stories of abuse, exploitation and violence against women, such as the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13.1-22?
2. In your context, what has been your experience of conversations about gender justice? How does this need to be changed?
3. How does culture affect discussions of unequal power relations?

## Section 2: Learning strategies

### Aims:

- To understand the importance of learning as a process.
- To participate in the threefold cycle: analysis of context, re-reading of the Bible and theological tradition to evaluate context, action to transform context.

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

*Luke 24.27*

The term 'education' derives from the Latin 'educare', which means 'to bring up', 'to raise', and 'to nourish'. The learner – and we are all learners – is to be 'educated', brought up like a plant in the garden by the educator. The learner already embodies potential and capabilities that should be developed with proper care and nourishment. While every learner is important, the learning processes that are the focus of this section emphasise collaborative and corporate learning. The learning process is a journey together, where everyone has something to contribute and to receive in order to build-up the just community of women and men.

The learning strategies outlined here have the aim of contributing towards the process of equality and equity with regard to power relationships and societal transformation. God calls us to act (think, speak and behave) for a life-giving journey: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Exodus 20.2), 'who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2.4).

These learning strategies will need to be contextualised and adapted into different regions and churches' realities. Thus, it is vital to listen to each other and to listen to the signs of the times in our own contexts. Dialogue is integral to learning, both dialogue with one another and dialogue with our particular contexts.

There are three components to this pedagogical process: analysing the signs of the times in our particular context; re-reading scripture corporately within these contextual realities in order to discern God's perspective on our contextual realities; and then to respond in action, working with God to bring about God's will in our context, 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6.10).

This pedagogical process is drawn from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24.13-35). This narrative account of the disciples' journey to Emmaus and then to Jerusalem is shaped by the pedagogy of Jesus. This threefold process is spiritual pedagogy appropriate to the work of transforming gender relations, drawing as it does on the values and ways of Christian life, and public testimony in the early church.

The threefold pedagogical process is a useful way of structuring or shaping our learning. The process begins with analysing our gender contexts. An in-depth analysis of context is the first component of the pedagogical process, involving a recognition and analysis of our lived realities. In this case, what is the lived reality of gender in our contexts? This first component of the pedagogical process requires a careful and critical analysis of the particular world in which

we live. Analysing our context is a group exercise, involving those who share this reality and who together analyse this reality, with a particular emphasis on the experience of the most marginalised sectors within this reality.

The second component of this pedagogical process requires a re-reading of scripture as together we discern what God intends for our lived reality. Does the lived reality conform to God's kin-dom<sup>18</sup> 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6.10)? Jesus makes it clear that God's will must be done on earth by those who are his family or kin: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3.33-35). Do all of Jesus' kin, including women, have life, and have it abundantly (John 10.10)? If not, then the pedagogical process shifts into the third phase of the threefold pedagogical process.

The third component of the threefold pedagogical process requires collaborative action for transformation and change. If the lived reality does not match God's vision for God's kin-dom on earth, then we must act with God to change the lived reality. If there is not yet gender justice for all, then we must work with God, guided by the scriptures, for just relationships between women and men, girls and boys.

When we have acted to change the lived reality, we must continue with the cycle, reflecting again on our action and what transformation it has brought and what more needs to be done. The threefold pedagogical process begins again. Indeed, this threefold pedagogical process is a form of spiritual discipline, a way of life for the person of faith. Some may be familiar with the terms See–Judge–Act for this threefold process. The process could also be summarised as 'taking in', 'taking stock', and 'taking action'. The terms we use are not important; what is important is the threefold learning process.

This threefold pedagogical process provides the overall shape to our learning and transformation. But the threefold learning process itself requires the recognition of the importance and practice of 'facilitation'. Facilitation is made up of the processes that enable each and every participant to feel safe and to have the opportunity to participate fully. Facilitation is specifically attentive to 'group process', the set of skills and resources that enables each and every person to participate fully in learning and transformation together.

Another important component of a participatory and enabling learning environment is the 'infrastructure of faith'. Faith is a vital component of all Christian learning and transformation. As we work together for just gender relationships, we should work within faith-full liturgy, whether formal or informal, including singing, praying, and other faith-full rituals.

Dialogue is the vital virtue that binds the threefold pedagogical process, facilitation, and the infrastructure of faith. Dialogue is a profound engagement with each other and with context. Dialogue is more than polite conversation or an educational technique. Dialogue is a transformative practice, transforming our relationships and our contexts. Luke's narrative of

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<sup>18</sup> The term 'kin-dom of God' recognises that Jesus is building a human community of God's people. The term 'kingdom of God' is a subversive term in the biblical world of empire, for it challenges the notion that the emperor is 'king'. The use of the term 'kin-dom' is a reminder that God has established Christian believers as "a chosen race/people/kin" (1 Peter 2.9).



the disciples' journey to Emmaus and to Jerusalem is a wonderful exposition of the threefold pedagogical process, of facilitation, and of the infrastructure of faith:

## Analysing context

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

*Luke 24.13-14*

Through dialogue and a shared journey, the disciples begin with their context. They dialogue with their context and with each other, analysing together the signs of the times. The context and its related world are the starting point for doing theology that is relevant and transforms life. In the same way, the gender learning process begins by walking together and sharing stories, including the personal, communal, political, ecclesial, and spiritual.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him.

*Luke 24.15-16*

Contextual analysis and faith-full collaborative dialogue are inhabited by Christ. Jesus comes alongside those who are engaged in analysing their context. An ordinary journey becomes a holy journey; ordinary dialogue becomes holy dialogue. Theology is always contextually embedded; theology is always dialogical.

And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

*Luke 24.17-24*

Jesus matches the pace of the disciples, asks questions, and listens. Jesus demonstrates what is required to analyse our contexts. Jesus begins with where the disciples are, with their understandings of their reality, but then goes on to probe and deepen the analysis through a facilitated dialogue.

## Re-reading scripture to discern God's perspective

Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures

*Luke 24.25-27*

Dialogue is not simply polite conversation. Dialogue can be confrontational, though respectful. Jesus re-visits scripture with the disciples. The church is often complacent in its understanding of scripture. This is certainly the case with respect to gender. We learn from Jesus that it is necessary to re-read scripture if we and our contexts are to be transformed. Scripture and its interpretation are vital resources as we discern God's perspective on just relationships between women and men, girls and boys. Jesus brings the lived reality of the disciples into dialogue with the prophetic voice of scripture, transforming their understanding of scripture and so of themselves and their context. The journey of the disciples becomes a journey of being transformed by a re-reading of scripture: 'be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12.2).

## Faith-full action

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*Luke 24.28-35*

The doing of theology leads to action. Social analysis and the re-reading of scripture have changed the disciples. They act. Their first action is to offer hospitality, deepening the opportunity for analysis, reflection, and dialogue. Jesus has facilitated the re-reading of scripture. Jesus has facilitated in-depth collaborative dialogue. The disciples respond, offering hospitality. They have been transformed by doing theology in this way. The collaborative analysis of context and the facilitated dialogue have transformed them.

But the transformation is incomplete without the infrastructure of faith. It is only in the eucharistic meal that they fully understand. Of course, the meal they share with Jesus is an ordinary meal, an act of hospitality. But it is also sacramental, providing another resource for

transformation, and then action. The use of 'reason', an Anglican virtue, is not sufficient on its own. Formation requires both intellectual and sacramental resources. The inclusive sharing of a meal becomes a site of further resources for transformation and action. The first action of the disciples is to offer hospitality. The second action of the disciples is to return to Jerusalem with a new scriptural mandate to take up the work of Jesus, to build a resilient, committed and missionary community.

The threefold pedagogical process of 'taking in', 'taking stock', and 'taking action', experienced by the disciples, is taken up and shared within this programme of study on just gender relationships between women and men, girls and boys. There is resource here for a careful in-depth analysis of gender contexts, for a prophetic re-reading of scriptural reflections on gender, and for faith-full action to participate in God's work of justice.

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. How do the steps or processes we have discerned from the Emmaus story offer resources for doing gender analysis and engaging in transformational action?
2. What other strategies or methods might be used to confront gender injustice in life and mission?
3. How do these learning strategies provide redemptive ways of working for gender justice within the mission of the church?

## Section 3: What is gender?

### Aims

- To recognise that gender is a universal part of every human being.
- To demonstrate through scripture that gender is an aspect of our common humanity, and that gender differences are important but do not determine our human worthiness.
- To emphasise that gender as a human attribute is understood and lived out differently in various cultures, and that as we engage with one another we participate in shaping cultural expectations and norms surrounding how gender is expressed.
- To recognise that the Bible itself offers differing understandings of gender relationships and wrestles with how to think theologically about gender in different contexts.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

*Genesis 1.26-27*

A child is born into the world. Immediately, people want to know if it is a boy or a girl. This is often how people tend to think and categorise each other, comparing the ways in which they differ. To think about gender beyond this simple question can be very difficult and mean many things, especially across a variety of cultures and languages.

Gender involves sexual difference, but it also affects how we interact with one another on matters that have little to do with sexuality during the course of our daily lives. New infants may be named, clothed or wrapped, or spoken to differently. Eventually they will learn about expectations and cultural norms surrounding their status as a girl or boy and how these will affect the ways in which they live or act in the world. Gender, then, is both physical and cultural.

Because of the vast cultural differences affecting how gender is expressed and lived, the biblical creation stories offer some common ground for beginning a discussion of what gender means. In the first chapter of Genesis, God first creates humanity. To be created in God's likeness, people are foremost created in God's goodness as fully and equally human. Gender is an important part of who people become and live in the world, but it does not determine their human worthiness or goodness. Like many other aspects or traits that allow people to differ from one another, gender is a trait that determines a person's role in matters of procreation and childbearing. Other differences vary by culture or society, such as the ways in which sexuality may be expressed. Although procreation implies a certain form of sexual expression, sexual intimacy can take a variety of forms.

Everyone has a gender of some sort, just as everyone is fully human and created in God's image. Although the first chapter of Genesis focuses on the two primary conditions of gender being male and female, the words do not indicate either or, male or female, which biblically leaves room for other conditions to be possible. The use of the plural to describe God creating humankind in 'our image', suggests the fullness of God beyond specific gender or other characteristics. Indeed, the Hebrew word *Elohim*, used to describe God in Genesis 1, comes from an ancient word representing a plural or a multiplicity in One. Differences in gender that might be expressed through sexuality were understood within the wholeness or fullness of God. In the second creation story (Genesis 2), the Hebrew word *ha-adam* refers to the first human. Only after the creation of a partner do they become differentiated as male and female, and yet despite their differences as partners, they are reminded that they are to be one flesh (v.24), representing unity and equality of humankind.

Some cultures historically as well as across the world today have understood gender to have more than two, male or female, conditions. Typically, an infant at birth is assigned a gender status, female or male. This is often made by physical inspection of the genitals, although sometimes it isn't easily clear and an assignment can be made that isn't accurate. Biologically, there can be occasional physiological, chromosomal, and hormonal differences that do not accurately fit a simple gender assignment of male or female. Sometimes a person can be born with both male and female biological aspects, and occasionally with neither. In some indigenous cultures, those who don't fit well with an assigned male or female status have been understood as two-spirited, and given a distinct or separate status. Sometimes those who vary have held distinctive roles as powerful healers, spiritual leaders, sources of wisdom, or another special, valued status. At other times, in some cultures, infants born without a clear gender assignment as male or female have been killed or treated harshly. In other situations, persons have been stigmatised because their gender does not fit easily into the categories or roles that a culture has developed for how people are to live and relate to each other.

Occasionally, when it is clear that an assigned gender status does not clearly fit a child or adult, it may be changed. Sometimes this is done physiologically, although there are other ways in which it can be handled such as socially and culturally. For example, in one context a young female is given the name of an esteemed male relative who died; because she shows some spiritual gifts that he once had. Therefore, she is allowed to undertake gender roles or activities open only to men in her culture, such as higher education and the ministry. In other contexts, females or males have simply lived socially as another gender, either openly or secretly. In other contexts, boys or men especially interested and adept at care-giving, cooking, or work associated with women's roles, have been able to take on those activities and roles. More typically today, there is a wide overlap in the types of work and activities that men and women undertake. However, they still must negotiate the forest of gender expectations and norms that affect how others think or treat them on the basis of their gender rather than on their common, shared humanity.

One of the most challenging aspects of gender involves those who may fit with the common male or female understandings of gender, but not in matters of emotional and sexual intimacy or procreation. This is part of the range of human gender variety and difference, just as are those who may be heterosexual but are not physically able to procreate. Cultures have addressed these forms of gender difference in varying ways, sometimes either treating such

persons as part of an extended family of uncles, aunties, or other-mothers who participate in the care and raising of children who are not biologically their own. In other situations, such variations have severely stigmatised persons and their fundamental humanity, including treatment as outcasts, imprisonment, or death.

People of faith within Christianity as well as across different religions have held deep beliefs surrounding matters of gender and sexuality, particularly homosexuality. However, these must also be discussed and treated in the context of a fundamental humanity that every person has been granted.

## Gender in everyday life

As family and friends learn about a new infant's gender, they may bring gifts to the new parents or offer a compliment on the cute baby girl or handsome baby boy. They may hold expectations about what that infant will grow up to be, such as their occupation, the amount or type of income they might earn, or whether they will care for their parents in their elderly years. Such expectations affect how others communicate with that infant and, over time, how that infant will come to understand themselves. These expectations surrounding gender, and how they are acted out, are how people in everyday life practise or construct the cultural and societal aspects of gender.

Sometimes people are unaware of how they construct or do gender themselves. For example, a teacher laid pictures of various objects on a table, such as a truck, lipstick, a piece of pink cloth, shaving implements, and many other items. Students were invited to pick out images that they liked. They then talked about why had they selected them.

Some admitted avoiding certain images because they represented an object that was associated with a masculine or feminine gender role that they didn't identify or associate themselves with. Some discussed how they liked an item even though they saw it associated with expectations of a different gender, including the tensions that this might create. Over the discussion, they were both constructing and critiquing the social aspects of gender, and occasionally challenging or changing those expectations. This brought a fresh awareness of how gender expectations affect and shape many everyday aspects of their lives, and how they participate in that process by the choices or decisions they make.

The ways in which people practise gender or reinforce expectations or taboos on one another vary not only by culture but also across history. For example, many gender practices and expectations differ markedly through the Old Testament. Moreover, women often had active roles in the earliest Christian churches, including leadership. However, many such roles later became closed to women. Today, women again have more roles in church life. However, their gender status often becomes more a point of controversy or conflict than their human abilities or skills to perform the work involved. When this occurs, it illustrates how societal differences surrounding gendered expectations can interfere with others' valuing and respecting basic human abilities that are independent of gender status.

In sum, how people treat one another differently because of their gender has not only varied over time, but is still evolving as they question, challenge, or reconstruct gendered

expectations and the limits they have imposed on one another, including injustice or harm that they have created.

While there is extensive talk about gender in our world today, the church struggles to engage with gender-talk.

## Gender-talk from a biblical perspective

Talking theologically about gender is difficult in many of our cultures, so we struggle to find a common language that enables us to have the kinds of conversations we need to have as the church.

The Bible is a resource that we can use for such conversations. The Bible itself offers us examples of gender-conversations. And the Bible offers a site within which our own gender-conversations can find resonance and resources.

### The Bible as gender-conversation

The Bible embodies conversations about gender. A careful reading of scripture makes it clear that communities of faith across the ages have grappled with gender questions. A good example is the creation stories we find in Genesis.

The book of Genesis begins by locating two different creation stories side by side. The first creation story (Genesis 1.1-2.4a) emphasises the equality of 'male and female' (1.26). There is no hint here of any hierarchy or difference. Both male and female are made 'in the image' and 'in the likeness' of God (1.26-27), both are responsible for 'ruling' (1.26, 28), both are 'blessed' (1.28), and both are responsible for being 'fruitful' (1.28). They are fully equal.

The second creation story (Genesis 2.4b-23) tells the story of God's creation of humanity differently. In this story God creates 'man' and 'woman' (2.23) from a single human (2.21), which seems to indicate that they are equal. But there are also indications in the way the 'man' names the 'woman' (2.23) that the male is one with more authority.

However, what about 2.24? This is not what we expect, that 'a man shall leave his father and his mother'. This does not happen anywhere in the rest of the Bible and it does not happen in most of our cultures. In fact, what usually happens is that the woman leaves her father and mother! We are reminded here that there may be situations in which the love of two people may disrupt traditional cultural gender norms.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are engaging in gender-conversation.

The book of Job engages in gender-conversation. In Job 2.9 Job's wife participates in a theological discussion with Job. Though he initially rebukes her (2.10), he comes to understand her theological perspective, for he begins to question God in chapter 3 and the chapters that follow. And at the end of Job's life he treats his sons and daughters equally, rejecting the customs of his time in which only sons inherited (42.15).

Furthermore, when God speaks to Job, God uses both male and female images for God: 'Has



the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?' (38.28-29; see also 38.8).

Job is engaging in gender-conversation.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul makes a radical claim: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (3.28). However, when writing to the Corinthians the same Paul does distinguish between male and female: '... women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says' (1 Corinthians 14.34). Clearly Paul is grappling with gender matters.

Paul engages in gender-conversation.

1 Peter likens patriarchy to slavery (3.1), encouraging both Christian slaves and Christian wives to 'accept' (2.18, 3.1) these systems, while knowing that they are 'free' in Christ (2.16).

1 Peter engages in gender-conversation.

And Jesus engages in gender-conversation.

The gospels engage in gender-conversation. Matthew's gospel even introduces a third gender! When Jesus and his disciples are discussing marriage, Jesus asks them to consider those who are 'eunuchs' (19.12). There are men, women, and eunuchs. Jesus and his disciples are doing gender-conversation.

Mark tells the beautiful story of Jesus affirming an older woman and a younger woman, making them subjects not objects (Mark 5.21-42). Mark tells these two stories together, weaving together the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman who is bleeding. These stories offer us a wonderful example of how we can participate, with scripture, in gender-conversation.

### **Bible study as gender-conversation**

Contextual Bible Study is a form of Bible study that invites us to bring the concerns of our daily realities to scripture for conversation. Contextual Bible Study invites us to read scripture slowly and carefully, drawing us into a conversation with scripture about matters that we find hard to talk about in church. Here is an example of a Contextual Bible Study on Mark 5.21-42. Before doing this Contextual Bible Study please read through Section 1 and Section 2 of these study materials.

1. Listen to a dramatic reading of Mark 5.21-43, inviting participants to be: the narrator; Jairus; the bleeding woman; Jesus; the disciples; servants from Jairus' house.
2. In small groups of between five to seven participants, read Mark 5.21-43 again. What is this biblical text about?
3. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about each of them? Draw a picture of the relationships between these characters in the story.

4. Mark connects these two women, seeing similarities in their encounters with Jesus. By re-reading the story carefully we can identify a number of similarities between the two women. What do the two women characters have in common?
5. Mark connects the two men, Jesus and Jairus, seeing similarities in the ways in which they relate to women. How do these two men relate to women?
6. More specifically, in his encounter with each of these women Jesus is challenging the gender systems of his time. What gender systems is Jesus challenging in his encounter with each woman?
7. What are the gender systems that shape the lives of women in our contexts?
8. How can we join Jesus in our contexts in working together for gender systems that include rather than exclude women?

Doing a Contextual Bible Study like this in a safe and sacred space encourages and enables gender-conversation. Contextual Bible Study is a communal form of biblical interpretation. Careful facilitation is required to create a safe and sacred space and the kinds of group processes that are needed for each participant to have the opportunity to participate fully. (See Section 1 and Section 2 of these study materials.)

Contextual Bible Study joins the gender-conversations of the Bible, recognising that communities of faith within the Bible are grappling with many similar gender realities as we are.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. What are the cultural symbols or images in your community that are associated with masculinity or femininity? How do those gendered symbols or images affect you or make you feel? What symbols or images are neutral, if any?
2. How do everyday gender expectations and practices differ from those in your family tradition or society of a generation ago? A century ago? In what ways have those changes affected how people live, the opportunities they have, or the choices they make?
3. In various historical times and cultures, a person's gender status and how their humanity is understood were closely linked, such as a woman being seen as less fully human than a man. How does this affect the ways in which we treat others who differ from ourselves? As Christians, why is respecting the full humanity of others despite our differences important?
4. Where else in the Bible are there good examples of gender-talk, given your local context?

## Section 4: Gender inequalities across cultures

### Aims

- To explore varied ways in which gender inequalities emerge in different cultures and societies that affect people's opportunities and limitations.
- To consider differences between gender inequality and inequity, and the importance of equity in addressing gender injustice.
- To discover the different ways in which systemic patterns of gender inequalities occur across cultural contexts and to identify ways in which they can be changed.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 3.28*

Gender can be a precious gift to help express human differences. But when that gift becomes corrupted in such a way that differences lead to some people being more highly valued or others marginalised and excluded, it harms the ability for a community or society to make the fullest use of the many gifts and abilities in its midst. It also obstructs the fulfilment of God's mission in the world. Jesus continually taught about the need for followers to treat one another as they would treat him (Matthew 25.31-46). Paul, in the early church, made this point when he emphasised that a person's status—whether involving ethnicity, power and servitude, or gender—did not make them greater or lesser in Christ (Galatians 3.28). All differences that people use to position themselves above one another are seen as equal to one another in the eyes of God.

Few societies have had complete gender equality, although women have had greater status and respect in some cultures than in others. Anthropologists have pointed out that in tribal or clan societies where livelihood depends either on hunting and gathering or primarily on horticulture, gender differences have not been valued or undervalued in ways that create significant inequalities. This is primarily because women can more easily fit in these economic activities with childbearing and nursing. Also in these subsistence or hand-to-mouth economies, everyone's labour is needed for survival.

As societies prosper and their primary economic activities involve the accumulation of wealth, such as in herding, large-scale agriculture, or the production of goods and services for barter and sale, gender differences are more likely to become unequally valued. Not only are women in childbearing and nursing stages more limited in the types of economic activities they can undertake, but prosperity typically brings increasing specialisation in various tasks, with those bringing in economic resources to the household being valued more. Also, as more families have wealth to pass on to heirs, the desire to know who is blood-related kin or a legitimate heir has resulted in greater supervision and control of women, in ways that men have not experienced themselves.

Biblically, many of these shifts are evident from the opening of Genesis, where the Garden represented a horticultural economy of sorts. Subsequently, people were clustered in tribal

nomadic groups that hunted and gathered or tended small flocks. Perhaps the most significant example involved the Israelites, having left Egypt and living a nomadic existence as they wandered in the desert. Although these early accounts offer many examples of gender inequality, this was also the era of God's covenant with Israel and the giving of the Ten Commandments, including the Commandment to honour one's father *and* one's mother, 'so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Exodus 20.12). As Israelites became able to settle down and agriculture and herding resulted in accumulation of wealth to pass on to heirs, greater inequalities emerge in how women and men are represented and treated.

Over time, differences in how men and women are expected to behave can grow increasingly rigid and unequal, often without consideration being given to whether they are moral or just. In the New Testament, Jesus' respect and treatment of women offered a powerful message of how important it was to restore gender justice by treating women equitably. Women were not to be stoned while men went unpunished for adultery (John 8.1-11). Women's menstrual blood was not seen as unclean or as defiling the one who might treat or heal her (Matthew 9.20-23). Women on the margins of society were worth engaging in serious conversation, as well as asking for life-giving water (John 4.5-42). Women were respected as serious students or disciples of the scriptures and were included in Jesus' inner circle (Luke 10.38-42, John 20.1-18). Women were among the leaders and valued contributors in the early Christian churches, such as Lydia (Acts 16.12-15, 40), and the apostle Junia (Romans 16.7). Overall, Christianity was a restorative movement for correcting gender inequalities and calling people into right relationship with one another and with God.

Sociologist Max Weber made two observations about women's status in religious communities over time.<sup>19</sup> First, women's status tends to be similar to men's in newer religious movements among people who tend to be marginalised in society, provided that the movements aren't focused on war or military might, such as the early Christian movement. And second, as newer religious movements develop a formal organisation, including a formal leadership structure such as clergy and a scriptural canon, women's status becomes increasingly marginalised from positions of leadership or responsibility. For example, women's leadership roles in the early church became contested as early as the turn of the first century as it gained converts and grew. Other contributing factors to this may have been political aspects of that era, including Roman militarisation and the growing status of Christianity among other religious movements, with its prominence also attracting Rome's attention and persecution.

## Gender differences, equality, and equity

Gender differences emerge partly from physiological differences in procreation, childbearing, and nursing infants and young children. However, there are also important differences within each gender. Not all women, for example, are able to bear children or to nurse them, whether because of age or a physical condition. This does not make them less of a woman, but it does mean that they have different opportunities as well as limitations. Similarly, not all men can produce offspring. This does not change their fundamental worth or their humanity in God's

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

esteem. It simply means that they have different limitations and opportunities in certain areas than other men. All other differences that we attribute to gender are socially constructed: through culture, a society's economic or political circumstances, or how society chooses to make one group more important or powerful than another. This also means that attitudes that construct inequalities are able to change if a society wishes to get rid of harmful stereotypes and notions of inequality that create injustice.

Very young children are aware of differences in gender, age and other characteristics, but they seldom place much value on those differences other than as a process of forming their identity by learning what one is, or is not. The value they begin to place on those differences, viewing some as better or more important than others, is learned from family members, their community, and surrounding culture. Gender stereotypes of what are considered masculine or feminine are passed from generation to generation by family, schools, and religious and social institutions. For example, what is masculine typically has been viewed as active and assertive, while femininity has been valued as passive and submissive. This becomes evident in the toys that children are encouraged to play with and how they are taught to behave. Once attitudes and prejudices form, they are more difficult but not impossible to change.

When speaking of gender inequality, it is critical to avoid the stereotypical notion that men are equally dominant and powerful and that women are equally powerless. A person's social and cultural location within a particular setting affects the potential power one might hold or not. Social location includes aspects such as age, socioeconomic wealth or poverty, ethnicity or race, and the extent to which a person conforms to the dominant norms and expectations of a society. Some men hold more power than other men, and not all women are equally powerless. However, some who have the potential to exercise considerable power or dominance may turn to other models of relationship, choosing instead to act through consensus, collaboration, or working to help empower others such as women even when doing so can involve giving up privileges that comes with their status. Therefore, any discussion of gender inequality needs to consider the differences within a shared gender status as well as between genders.

Gender equality is different from gender equity. Not everyone has the same gifts or abilities, and some have more physical or mental limitations than others. Sometimes differences are temporary, such as the physical and emotional demands of childbearing or care-giving responsibilities; other times they are permanent. While people are not equally the same, all are equally valued by God. Differences themselves are simply part of our humanity, and not justifications for valuing some persons more than others.

Gender equity means that differences are valued in an equivalent manner that is fair and just to all. Equity is most evident in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, where he speaks of the different parts of the body, and how all have a different but nonetheless valuable function. This makes the point that differences in the Christian community are gifts that should be valued equivalently even if the functions of one or the other vary markedly. Ephesians 5.21-33 offers another example of how gender equity was negotiated in the early Christian community. Although husbands were given a role of headship of the household, which for many in different cultural contexts can be controversial in how it is understood, husbands also were commanded to love their wives, with a love that is representative of Christ, grounded in mutual respect and honour. In no way did this mean treating them as property or harming

them physically or emotionally, just as they themselves would not want to be harmed. The important teaching of this passage has to do with equity and mutuality, bonded in love. It becomes violated when that equity and mutuality turn into inequality, abuse, and other forms of violence.

Gender equality in the theological sense, means that all humanity is equally deserving of God's attention and love, regardless of gender or other differences. As Christians, Jesus emphasises gender equality before God in the love of neighbour as oneself, and in not doing to others what one would not want for oneself (Matthew 22.36-39). The Apostle Paul in Galatians 3.28 is even more specific in saying that in Christ our varied differences and the inequalities we attach to them do not exist. If, in Christ or in the Reign of God, such inequalities do not exist, then why do we as Christians continue to hold on to them?

Gender equity matters both for men and women. Although men may give up power that comes with dominance over women, they gain respect based on love rather than fear. They also move closer to the model for equitable relationships that New Testament scripture has called us to follow.

## Gender inequality and sexuality

Gender inequality often becomes expressed through sexuality. What people learn from their society about what are legitimate and taboo forms of sexuality often shape their sexual behaviour. Historically and culturally, sexuality has different meanings. Sexual behaviours vary not only in type but also in intention and intensity. In some contexts they can involve something as simple as gazing directly at another person, or touching a hand or any other part of the body. Gender status and the range of sexual expectations that surround manhood or womanhood also affect understandings of sexuality.

Sexuality is one of the most profound ways in which a person expresses intimacy and love for another. It also can be a way of exerting self-interest, power, and dominance over another. Social philosopher Michel Foucault<sup>20</sup> has pointed out that sexuality is a primary way that power is expressed in society, especially in power relations. Women and girls are more likely to be raped than men and boys as a consequence of war, conflict, and acts of personal violence. Men too can be raped as a form of power relations, where it is used to assert dominance. Sometimes rape occurs as a matter of incest where relationships of dominance and power are exerted over those who are vulnerable and where taboos against speaking out can make girls and women subject to repeated abuse. Rape and abuse are a violation of Christ's call for mutual love and respect. This mutuality provides a relationship of equity that helps address the inequality of power relations.

Christians are especially divided in their beliefs about homosexuality. Some of these divisions involve culture, society, and the reading and interpretation of scripture. As a way of creating equity toward those with whom one disagrees while maintaining the integrity of one's faith, space should be allowed for mutual respect and dialogue.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.

## Gendered space and gender inequality

The control of public and private space has a long history in determining how gender and other forms of inequality are maintained. We don't often think of how space can be gendered, with different limits on where it is acceptable for women or men to go, and the various penalties for anyone who enters a space where she or he is not supposed to be. The penalties might be slight, such as momentary embarrassment until one leaves that space, or they may be significant such as inciting violence against the one who has entered forbidden space.

Within each culture, gendered space also includes how we are taught to walk or move, the facial or hand gestures we might use, how our bodies are clothed or covered, and the potential of violence against those who transgress the norms for how people move through or occupy space. Women's use of space becomes monitored and controlled in ways that men's is not. Although space may be gendered, power relations play out in how that space is controlled, which spaces are limited for some by others, and who seeks to enforce penalties and the extent or significance of those penalties.

In many cultures young children may play together in the same space, or perform similar activities or chores, without inciting concern or attention to gender differences.<sup>21</sup> Typically, as girls approach puberty, their use of space becomes more restricted than for boys. Such messages are communicated through values of modesty and fears of physical and sexual violence for girls and women who transgress that space, whether in clothing or coverings, or appearing in certain public spaces that become off-limits unless with someone who is considered appropriate for that space, such as a chaperone, or family member. For instance, if someone is 'out of place', there is a penalty. In some contexts, being out of place is viewed as deserving whatever might happen, which becomes a justification for acts of dominance and violence. Although this may hold for men as well, the restrictions on space are far more abundant for women.

Gendered space becomes sexual space where boundaries are transgressed. Violence becomes sexual violence, where women and other vulnerable groups (such as transgendered, intersex individuals, or gay men) are seen as vulnerable and 'out of place' in the space they occupy, or persons who do not conceal their different status in publicly gendered space.

The result is that men have access to far more public space than women, without fear of repercussions or threats of violence. Even in urban and westernised cultures, women often don't have the same social freedom as men to walk in the same public spaces at night, or to travel alone through questionable neighbourhoods, or to visit the same eating and drinking establishments. Although the same physical risks may exist for men, the fear of physical violation and violence for women effectively restricts the use of space for many women.

Over time, women's limitation of space affects their ability to perform certain tasks or to gain the skills and experience necessary for some jobs or occupations. As a result,

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<sup>21</sup> Cindi Katz discusses gendered space in her research in Sudan and the United States; see her essay "Growing Girls/Closing Circles: Limits on the Spaces of Knowing in Rural Sudan and United States Cities." In C Katz and J Monk (Eds.) *Full Circles: Geographies of Women over the Life Course*. Routledge (1993): 88-106. Reprinted with new epilogue in D L Hodgson (Ed.) *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*. St Martins Press (2001): 173-202



gendered control of space can restrict women's ability to work certain jobs, shifts, or entire occupations. It also can affect their ability to get an education. The gendered inequalities that develop through spacial restrictions also become internalised through a sense of what one can or cannot do, can or cannot be. Power is reflected through the use or restriction of space, which is gendered.

## Challenges to gender inequality in the use of space

Biblically, Jesus challenged the practices of his day by listening and speaking to women 'out of place' in public space, especially when appearing alone: whether they were asking for healing, or the woman he met at the well. His message was clearly that one's fundamental humanity was to be respected in every space, and that one's gender did not determine the amount of respect or treatment one should receive. In this way, Jesus points to the fundamental equality that all deserve, regardless of their gender.

Church has always been a space where women have been able to be welcomed. It also often is gendered. Certain groups, committees, or guilds may be gender segregated. Some spaces may be difficult or taboo for those of another gender to enter, depending on particular culture or beliefs, such as the area surrounding the altar or the sacristy. Even in church, gendered space at times can be unsafe, where sexual seduction and violence occur. Some of the arguments used against women's ordination have involved gendered space, such as concerns over female menstruation, female powers to incite male sexuality, the pastor needing to work at night when space may become especially dangerous, or needing to enter risky neighbourhoods when visiting parishioners.<sup>22</sup> Such concerns have seldom if ever been expressed for men.

## Gender inequality in productive and reproductive work

In most societies that have developed enough wealth to move beyond a subsistence economy, the work that women and men perform often becomes divided into specialised jobs, tasks, and occupations. Typically, women have become primarily responsible for *reproductive work*, the types of work involving childbearing and rearing, cooking, sewing, family care, and other tasks involved in maintaining the household. Men have taken on jobs or occupations that involve bringing in income and other resources to the household, which in economic terms is commonly called *productive work*. This classic division of labour is familiar to most contemporary societies.

The gendered division of labour involves several problems: not only is productive and reproductive labour unequal in terms of economic rewards, but also in the amount of work involved. The saying 'women's work is never done' often means that women seldom have time to relax after a day's work, since meals must be prepared and cleaned up, and family needs attended to. In households where women want to do *productive work*, or need to do it for economic survival or sustainability, they still often are mostly or totally responsible for the

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<sup>22</sup> Emily C Hewitt and Suzanne R Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* Seabury Press, New York, 1973.  
<http://www.womenpriests.org/ecumenism/women-priests-yes-or-no-by-emily-c-hewitt-and-suzanne-r-hiatt/>

*reproductive work* as well. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild<sup>23</sup> has called this the ‘second shift’ that women do, and which is rarely shared equally or equitably by men. She suggests that changing this inequity begins with valuing men’s involvement in reproductive work, which includes workplaces accommodating men’s participation in family life. Only when unpaid reproductive work is shared equitably can paid work move toward greater gender equity.

When women do engage in paid work, they often face limitations on the types of occupations or positions that they can hold because of their gender status rather than their skills or abilities to perform the work. Some have argued that women are better suited to some types of work than others, typically jobs and occupations that do not bring in economic income to the household, or lower-wage work than the jobs that men typically hold. Such arguments often have been made by men as a means of justifying women’s exclusion from work viewed as desirable or well-paying.

Where men and women have the same occupation, men typically have been promoted to better paid or leadership positions despite women having the same or similar qualifications. Women typically become clustered into lower level and lower-paid positions while men become concentrated in higher-paid supervisory, management and leadership positions. Even where men and women hold the same job, men are typically paid more than women. Sometimes justifications have been attempted as a way to argue the moral equity of paying men more, such as the greater likelihood that women will quit, that they will be absent more often, that they are more emotional, that their pay is a second income and not necessary for the household, and so forth. And this has been despite the lack of evidence or knowledge of specific circumstances. Inequality in pay has especially affected women in households where they are the sole economic support for their family. These inequalities are found in societies around the world, regardless of economic wealth or the percentage of women engaged in the paid workforce. Overall, the amount and type of work that women and men continue to do is still neither equal nor equitable.

Gender inequalities in both unpaid reproductive work in the household and in paid work affect power relationships between men and women. Not only must women work longer and harder for whatever they get, including the second shift of household work and childcare, but research has shown that power relationships within the family are typically affected by income.<sup>24</sup> In households where women make an income comparable to men’s, decision-making is more equitably shared, and women’s status is higher than where they have little or no income of their own. This also has been the case where women have had to migrate to find work outside their local community, typically because little work is available locally for women or men.

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<sup>23</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003

<sup>24</sup> Hochschild; also see Judy Brink and Joan Mencher, eds. *Mixed blessings: gender and religious fundamentalism cross culturally*. New York: Routledge, 1997

## Gender inequality and work in the church

In the church, women and men have typically done different tasks, with men normally in decision-making positions on how religious labour is to be undertaken or divided by gender. Despite where men's and women's work overlapped in the early church, women's church work subsequently became gender segregated and disproportionately unpaid. Since the mid-twentieth century, women's and men's vocational work in most Anglican and Episcopal churches has increasingly overlapped, although the extent has varied according to culture and provincial or diocesan theological beliefs. Anglican women now are ordained as bishops, priests and deacons on every continent, although not in all churches or dioceses. Lay women and men increasingly hold similar staff or volunteer positions as well, although there still is a gender gap in leadership positions and in paid compensation for similar work.

Challenges still remain to make the fullest use of everyone's gifts and abilities regardless of one's gender in a wide variety of lay and ordained ministries, for the benefit of the church and its mission. Where cultural norms prevent full gender equality, a careful analysis is necessary of where and how such norms have emerged, and whether they are equitable or unjust in terms of who benefits and who is harmed, and whether they are mutually agreed upon by all who are affected by them. In short, there may be reasons for inequality, but mutuality and equity are fundamental to our Christian faith and mission.

## Gendered organisations and inequality

Sociologist Joan Acker<sup>25</sup> has pointed out that organisations themselves are gendered, including the jobs and expectations surrounding those organisations. She claims that when men form organisations, including the occupations and the positions they hold, they do so from their own context and interests. Where jobs and occupations have been normally held by men, then they typically have evolved from expectations of what might be appropriate for men. Such expectations may involve leadership style, how finances should be managed, the hours one works especially on a work site, or how well others evaluate the person doing the work. As women enter, they can be held to those expectations regardless of whether they are necessary to the work or not.

Female clergy encounter a gendered organisational context in many ways. She may be expected to use a leadership style similar to that used by men, as a measure of how effective or well she performs. If she appears less authoritative or decisive, she may be criticised. At the same time, if she uses the exact same style as expected of men, she may be criticised for being too bossy or aggressive, since she is transgressing gendered expectations for her behaviour. Also, there are different organisational expectations for the clergy spouse. Since Anglican and Episcopal clergy historically have mostly been married men, their wives traditionally have contributed a sizable amount of unpaid work to the congregation through leadership of women's groups, Sunday school, music, or other areas. When a wife has her own career, tensions can arise concerning the extent of the contribution that she is able to make.

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<sup>25</sup> Joan Acker, 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations', *Gender & Society* 4 (1990):139-158

Clergy research has suggested that married men are more likely to be hired than women partly because of expectations that the congregation will obtain the unpaid labour of the female spouse as well.<sup>26</sup> Such expectations do not hold equally for the male spouse of a female priest. To transform the church organisation toward gender equality in leadership and other aspects historically developed or populated by men, it needs to be examined for gender biases. Where biases are found, those affected by them whether positively or negatively need to rethink how the organisation can be adjusted so that it is equitable for all.

## Transforming gender inequality

Any type of gender inequality that deprives people of making the fullest use of their skills and abilities in the service of one another, including family, community, church, and society overall, can and should be addressed and changed. The exploitation of anyone for the benefit of another violates Christianity's mandate to love and treat one another as one would for oneself. Therefore, all relationships must be grounded in respect for one another. This does not mean that boundaries or limits do not need to be set; but where perfect gender equality is not feasible, gender equity can transform injustice into just relationships grounded in mutual acceptance and respect. To be equitable, all who are affected must be represented in developing a solution or a way forward. One party cannot autonomously decide what is equitable for another.

Ideally, the ends of gender equality and equity should involve integrating and including people in a way that breaks down the unequal value that is placed on our human differences, especially where some have been revered and others have been disrespected. The church has an important opportunity to model what might be possible in wider society.

## Questions for discussion

1. What are some of the gender inequalities or inequities in your community or context that limit women's opportunities or participation? Are there any that limit men's opportunities or participation?
2. What are the types of gendered expectations that create or support the gender inequalities or inequities in your culture or context? Who is setting or reinforcing them: men, women, or both?
3. How might some of the gender inequalities or inequities that concern you the most be addressed or changed?

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<sup>26</sup> Paula Nesbitt, 'Marriage, Parenthood and the Ministry: Differential Effects of Marriage and Family on Male and Female Clergy Careers', *Sociology of Religion*, 56, 4 (Winter 1995): 397-415

## Section 5: Gender-based violence and abuse

### Aims:

- To analyse the causes of gender-based violence and abuse in the church and society.
- To understand how the Bible can be a tool for and against gender-based violence.
- To propose ways in which the church can be more effective in dealing with issues of gender-based violence.

The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates the lover of violence. On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulphur; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

*Psalm 11.5-7*

### Gender-based violence

In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality and affects people from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. It is violence that is directed at an individual, based on their specific gender in society. While it can affect both males and females, gender-based violence affects women and girls disproportionately. Research undertaken by the World Health Organization has shown that worldwide one in three women experience physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner.<sup>27</sup> Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world.<sup>28</sup> Men and boys also experience gender-based violence, especially when their gender identity conflicts with society's gender norms.

Gender-based violence reinforces gender hierarchies and perpetuates gender inequalities. According to a United Nations study entitled *Ending Violence against Women*:

The roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women and pervasive discrimination against women in both the public and private spheres. Patriarchal disparities of power, discriminatory cultural norms and economic inequalities serve to deny women's human rights and perpetuate violence. Violence against women is one of the key means through which male control over women's agency and sexuality is maintained.<sup>29</sup>

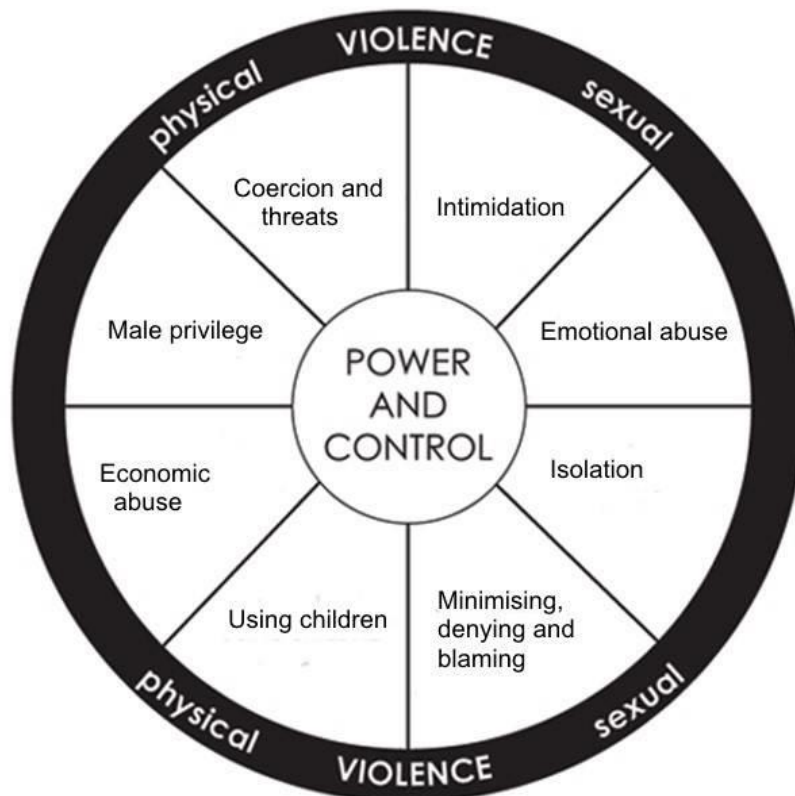
When powerful men are placed at the top of the pyramid of human relations and are encouraged to see power as domination and control, they are prone to use power against people who are vulnerable and less powerful or powerless.

Gender-based violence may take the form of domestic abuse. The 'Power and Control' wheel below, adapted from the Duluth model, shows the common themes and experiences of victims

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organisation, 2014

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Population Fund, 'Gender-based Violence', <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence>

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, *Ending Violence against Women, Study of the Secretary-General* (New York: United Nations, 2006), ii, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-exeE-use.pdf>



- **Coercion and threats:** Making and carrying out threats to do something to hurt the other person; threatening to leave, to commit suicide, to report the other person to the authorities; making the other person drop charges; making the other person do illegal things.
- **Intimidation:** Making the other person afraid by using looks, actions, gestures; smashing things; destroying the other person's property; abusing pets; displaying weapons.
- **Emotional abuse:** Putting the other person down; making the other person feel bad about themselves; calling names; making the other person think they are crazy; playing mind games; humiliating the other person; making them feel guilty.
- **Isolation:** Controlling what the other person does, who they see and talk to, what they read, where they go; limiting their outside involvement; using jealousy to justify actions
- **Minimising, denying and blaming:** making light of the abuse and not taking their concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse didn't happen; shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour; saying the other person caused it.
- **Using children:** making the other person feel guilty because of the children; using the children to relay messages; using visitation (where a couple is separated) to harass the other person; threatening to take the children away.
- **Economic abuse:** preventing the other person from getting or keeping a job; making them ask for money; giving the other person an allowance; taking their money; not letting the other person know about or have access to family income.
- **Male privilege** (where the abuser is male and the victim female): treating her like a servant; making all the big decisions; acting like the 'master of the castle'; being the one to define men's and women's roles.

who have lived in an abusive relationship. It includes examples of the range of tactics used by abusers.

Gender-based violence includes physical and sexual violence and harassment, child or enforced marriage, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, and harm inflicted on people with marginalised sexuality.

During war and military or civil conflict, social and political unrest and instability, and forced migration, gender-based violence multiplies.

Social organisations and women's groups have brought to light the magnitude and pervasiveness of gender-based violence in our society. These groups have sometimes been able to provide protection and shelter, counselling, and advocacy for women and children whose lives have been devastated by it. Survivors of violence are not passive victims and many show remarkable courage and resilience. Some speak out against cultural and social factors that perpetuate violence, and become agents of change.

Below are three examples of gender-based violence: gender-based violence against migrants, refugees and displaced people; sex trafficking; and rape, abuse and violence.

- **Gender-based violence against migrants, refugees, and displaced people**

Though migration is not a new phenomenon, migration has become a major crisis in our time. Every day, millions of people are displaced and on the move because of conflict, persecution, or political, economic, or ecological circumstances.

A United Nations Refugee Agency 'Global Trends' study revealed that 68.5 million people were displaced at the end of 2017, having been forcibly driven from their homes across the world.<sup>30</sup>

Those seeking shelter in neighbouring countries often put their lives in danger on treacherous journeys. The increase of violence and intolerance toward migrants, refugees, and displaced people is alarming in our contemporary world. The unequal power relations between women and men are reproduced or exacerbated during migration, which leaves women more susceptible to violence during the migration process.

When her husband died, Amina (pseudonym) had to migrate to India to earn money and escape sexual harassment from her neighbour. In India she worked as a construction labourer, moving from place to place with strangers and often sexually harassed. She was often denied her wages unless she had sex with her employer or the person who paid the wages. She was compelled to become involved in the sex trade to support her family, so she became both a construction labourer and a sex worker.

*Source: Fiona Samuels, Stories of Harassment, Violence and Discrimination: Migrant Experiences between India, Nepal and Bangladesh. [www.academia.edu/4632183/Stories\\_of\\_harassment](http://www.academia.edu/4632183/Stories_of_harassment)*

Gender-based violence stands out as one of the main violations faced by women migrant workers, refugees, and displaced people throughout the world. Many have been physically

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/>



abused, sexually harassed, raped, and even killed. Survivors suffer sexual and reproductive consequences, such as forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV.

Women who migrate to other countries through international marriage sometimes face physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by their spouses. These migrant brides may barely know their husbands and be economically dependent on their husbands. Language and cultural barriers exist between the couples and unequal relationships in the family allow the husbands to dominate their wives. As these women are often isolated in society, they have little support when domestic violence occurs.

Refugee girls and women are especially vulnerable to exploitation and are often subjected to all forms of violence in their daily lives. For example, research into the plight of women fleeing from Syria and Iraq to Europe revealed that the women faced violence, assault, sexual harassment, and a high risk of being trafficked at every stage of their journeys.<sup>31</sup>

#### Voices of Syrian Women Refugees

##### *Harassment, sexual abuse, and living in constant fear:*

'I never got the chance to sleep in settlements. I was too scared that anyone would touch me. The tents were all mixed and I witnessed violence.' Reem, a 20-year-old woman from Syria

##### *Sexual exploitation by smugglers:*

'Smugglers target women who are travelling alone knowing that we are more vulnerable. My friend who came with me from Syria ran out of money in Turkey, so the smuggler's assistant offered her to have sex with him [in exchange for a place on a boat]; she of course said no, and couldn't leave Turkey, so she's staying there.' Hala, a 23-year-old woman from Aleppo

*Source: Amnesty International, 'Physical Assault, Exploitation and Sexual harassment on their journey through Europe'*

## **Biblical mandates for ending xenophobia and building up a culture of hospitality**

The Bible is full of stories of migration, forced migration, people in exile, and refugees. The Bible affirms strongly and unequivocally the obligation to treat strangers, migrants, foreigners and refugees with dignity and hospitality.

- Leave food for the poor and the alien, *Leviticus 19.9-10*
- Love the alien as yourself, *Leviticus 19.33-34*
- Do not oppress a resident alien, *Exodus 23.9*
- God loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing, *Deuteronomy 10.18-19*
- Judgment for those who thrust aside the alien, *Malachi 3.5*
- Open the door for the traveller, *Job 31.32*
- Welcome the stranger *Matthew, 25.31-36*

In order to combat xenophobia and to build a culture of hospitality toward migrants and refugees, and especially women and girls among them, it is important to remember that Jesus

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<sup>31</sup> <http://bit.ly/2v0uKXv>



was a refugee. Luke's Gospel depicts Jesus as *paroikos*, which can be translated as 'stranger', 'resident alien', 'sojourner' or 'immigrant' (Luke 24.18). The genealogy of Jesus includes the names of five women and three among them, Tamar, Rahab and Ruth, were Gentiles and foreigners living in the land of Israel (Matthew 1.2-16). Tamar and Rahab faced different forms of gender-based violence, while Ruth had to marry Boas in order to provide for herself and her mother-in-law.

Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. Her precarious condition was similar to the situations faced by many migrant pregnant women in today's context. After Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph fled with the baby Jesus to Egypt to escape the killing of baby boys by Herod. In his adult life, Jesus was portrayed or viewed by others as an outsider or a vagabond. Jesus moved with his disciples from place to place, seeking and receiving hospitality from others. Jesus said, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matthew 8.20). Moreover, Jesus' ministry was not confined to among Jews alone. He did not discriminate between Jews or Gentiles, slaves or foreigners, men or women. Jesus, the ultimate refugee, said, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matthew 25.40).

- **Sex trafficking**

Human trafficking, especially the sex trafficking of women and girls, has become a lucrative business around the world. Sex trafficking means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or purchase of persons for performing commercial sexual acts. Sex trafficking can be a transnational process in which the victims are recruited abroad and transported to another country where they are exploited for sex. It can also be a domestic phenomenon, with no border crossing involves. According to a report in 2017, about 4.8 million people were victims of sex trafficking, most of them female. They bring in huge profits for traffickers each year, who see a financial opportunity to cash in on the fastest-growing criminal enterprise in the world.<sup>32</sup>

Traffickers take advantage of poverty, the lack of prospects, and hopes for a better future to lure and trick victims. Women and young girls are promised employment opportunities – perhaps as models, nannies, waitresses, and dancers, which prove to be false, or marriage prospects in big cities or abroad. However, upon arrival, they are coerced into dependence through debt bondage, violence and drugs. They are abused, threatened or sold in the sex industry and are deprived of their human rights, freedom and self-respect.

Some major cities in the world have become hubs for sex trafficking. For example, in the USA, Atlanta is one of the top cities for sex trafficking because it has one of the world's busiest airports and has a growing entertainment industry. Sex trafficking reaps plenty based on the exploitation of vulnerable women, homeless youths and people from poor and Indigenous communities. In order to combat this problem, government agencies, civic groups, women's

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<sup>32</sup> 'Human Trafficking by the Numbers', Human Rights First, January 7, 2017, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>

organisations and religious communities, including the churches, must work together to change laws, policies, attitudes and behaviours, and to provide support for survivors.

- **Rape, sexual violence and abuse**

Rape and sexual violence against women are concrete examples of male domination and control over women's bodies and sexuality. These cases are often shrouded in silence because of shame and stigma. Victims who have the courage to report to the authorities may be further traumatised by insensitive healthcare workers, police, and court officials. Many of these cases are not prosecuted and perpetrators are not brought to justice. Women's groups have spoken out against sexual violence of all forms and demanded change of legislation and the training of persons helping survivors. Crisis centres and hotlines have been established in some countries to help rape victims.

The prevalence of rape and sexual abuse can be illustrated by using India as an example. The number of cases of rape has increased at an alarming rate in India. In a Thomson Reuters Foundation survey in 2018, India was named as the most dangerous country for women after coming fourth in the same survey seven years previously. This ranking was based on the risk of sexual violence and harassment against women, the danger women face from cultural, tribal and traditional practices, and the danger of human trafficking including forced labour, sex slavery and domestic servitude.<sup>33</sup>

Data for 2016 from India's National Crime Records Bureau revealed that 106 rapes a day were recorded, and four out of every ten victims were children. The cycle of violence continues. Some estimates indicate that only 10 per cent of rapes are actually reported. The number of rapes, sexual assaults and attacks on women and children from minority communities is increasing. The politicisation of religion has further aggravated the situation and religious fundamentalists have promoted violence against minorities.

An eight-year-old girl, Asifa Ban, from a nomadic Muslim Bakarwal community in Kathua in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir was abducted and gang raped by Hindu Brahmins inside a Hindu temple and murdered in January 2018.

An Indian nun in her mid-forties from the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate was brutally attacked, molested, and raped in the Raipur capital of Chattisgarh State in India in June 2015. Three months earlier, in March 2015, six men raped a 74-year-old nun at a local convent school in Ranaghat in the West Bengal State in India.

Women and girls are not safe even within their own religious communities. Rape and sexual violence occur within churches and church-run institutions. Most of the time, women are penalised and shamed if they gather the courage to break the silence. Despite facing violence and sexual abuse, Indian women are not passive victims and they show resilience in their striving for justice in solidarity with others. Grassroot and women's groups have demanded an end to the culture of rape and sexual violence and they have drawn attention to gender injustice in their country.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://poll2018.trust.org/>

## Gender-based violence as a theological and ethical issue for the church

Gender-based violence challenges the Christian belief that human beings are created in the image of God. Genesis says, 'So God created humankind in his image, in the Image of God he created them, male and female he created them' (1.27).

Gender-based violence is also a contradiction to Christian teachings on forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. The teaching of Jesus on forgiving 'not seven times, but seventy-seven times' for instance has been used to encourage the abused (especially women) to keep forgiving their abusers without calling for repentance on the part of the abuser. In fact, biblical teachings on forgiveness are closely related to repentance and justice-making.

Similarly, the concept of Jesus as a victim and a sacrifice has been used to reinforce structures of violence. The woman who has been violated is reminded that she does not suffer as much as Jesus did. She is told to persevere and endure, and to sacrifice for the sake of the family. Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye observes, 'A sacrifice is that which is freely and consciously made, and is noble and lovely, loving and motivated by love and gratitude. Violence against women is none of these'.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, biblical texts on the relationship between men and women have been interpreted to reinforce gender hierarchy and women's submission. The household codes (eg, Ephesians 5.22-6.9) are used to glorify a family ideology, which teaches that family as an institution takes priority over the lives of family members. Women have died in abusive relationships because of the ways in which biblical texts about gender relationships in family life have been interpreted.

The use of the Bible to reinforce women's submission is in sharp contrast to how Jesus has shown compassion toward women survivors and victims of violence. Jesus challenged the status quo regarding the culture of gender-based violence in his society and promoted 'life in its fullness' and dignity for women. The provision of hospitality, support, care, and protection for survivors and ending gender-based violence are essential parts of Christian ministry. Since women are part of the body of Christ and created in God's image, violence and injustice perpetuated on them means inflicting violence and wounds on the body of Christ.

Since gender-based violence is a taboo subject, churches can help by educating the community about gender justice and treating women and girls with respect and dignity. Religious leaders can speak out against the culture of violence and emphasise the church's responsibility in fostering a caring and compassionate community, especially during times of war, conflict and social unrest. Religious communities can work with non-governmental organisations and international agencies to assist and support migrants, refugees and displaced persons, and offer them hope and pastoral care. Churches need to reinterpret scriptures and theological traditions so that these will not be used to justify gender-based violence. Following Jesus' example, the church needs to preach an inclusive Gospel and promote healthy and holistic relationships between women and men, girls and boys.

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<sup>34</sup> Mercy Oduyoye and Elizabeth Amoah, 'The Christ for African Women' in Virginia Fabella and Mercy Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women doing Theology*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.44

'Every Sunday my church is overflowing with women, men and children. I sit in the back thinking, I wish the priest would talk about violence against women – this congregation hangs on his every word!'

*Quoted in 'Perspectives on Prevention', the newsletter of the Uganda-based GBV Prevention Network, issue no. 15, December 2010*

### **Questions for discussion**

1. What do you know about gender-based violence and abuse in your context?
2. Has the Bible been used to justify women's subordination in your context? How can that be changed?
3. What are the ways that churches can respond to gender-based violence and abuse?

## Section 6: Theological perspectives

### Aims

- To summarise and highlight a foundational theology of the inherent dignity of every person based on their being created in the image of God.
- To point to the calling of the church to bring this dignity to expression through the communion of all people in Christ.
- To explore how the Anglican Communion in particular can fulfil this calling.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

*Genesis 1.27*

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

*Psalms 139.13-14*

### 1. The dignity of the human person within creation

After looking at the extent and depth of gender inequality, abuse and violence in the world it is important to remember why the Christian faith is so opposed to it. On what grounds do Christians struggle with this injustice in the world? This is ultimately a theological question about the nature of God and creation. Scripture and Christian tradition teach that God creates all things out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), an act of infinite generosity. The very existence of creation is a gift, an expression of the eternal divine love of the persons of the Trinity. Within this created order, scripture then teaches that humanity is created in the image of God (*imago dei*). This has come to form the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person (Genesis 1.28-29). While the whole of creation resembles the glory of the creator (Psalm 19.1), humanity is unique amongst creatures because women and men are made in God's image and likeness.

How precisely does humanity reflect the image of God? There have been attempts to locate this in particular human qualities or capacities, such as having consciousness, or speech, or freedom of choice. But each of these has not stood up to criticism. There are human beings who lack these capacities but who remain human to the core of their being. In a recent paper to the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order, Simon Oliver clearly and concisely points to a different approach. This section draws on his paper as a representative example of current Anglican thinking.

Rather than locate the divine image solely in an essential human quality or characteristic, we may look first to God and the divine call to the whole of humanity. That call is first heard in God's creative Word (Genesis 1.3 and John 1.3-4) in which creation is called into being. The first truth of every creature is that it is called into being and receives its

existence as a gift, for no creature is the ground of its own existence. Every creature, including every human person, is first and foremost a gift to itself.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of gift is rich and suggestive, not only for human identity but for the centrality of relationship and communion in making up who we are:

What is the importance of understanding the human person as a gift? The scriptures reflect deeply on the significance of gift. St Paul writes 'For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' (1 Corinthians 4.7). The Holy Spirit, frequently known in the Christian tradition as 'the gift',<sup>36</sup> is the source of the gifts which form the Church (1 Corinthians 12.4-6). Human relations are expressed through gifts, whether they be donations of time, talents, skill, attention, care or money. These are gifts of love which form and express a relationship and therefore bear meaning and significance, not simply utility. In the giving of a gift, the gift bears something of the giver to the recipient. The reciprocal sharing of gifts forms family bonds and community. The sharing of the gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit forms the Church.

This highlighting of gift exchange begins to show why the concept of communion is central to the identity of humanity:

In common with all creation, humanity receives itself as a gift from God. The gift of our humanity bears something of the giver, God, to the recipient, the human person. Although humanity receives everything from God, it is called in turn to give itself to God in thankfulness. Humanity is called into loving exchange, or communion, with God and gives voice to creation's gift of praise and thanksgiving...

This relationship with God, whether acknowledged or not, is therefore the defining feature of what it is to be human, going beyond all human differences, not least gender:

There is, however, only one relation that is wholly definitive of every creature: its relation to God who creates all things. Outside this relation to God the creator, every creature, including the human person, is nothing. Whilst every human person is the offspring of a parental relationship and enters a variety of living relations as, for example, sibling, spouse, parent, friend, colleague, leader or helper, no single relationship between human persons wholly defines those persons. A woman may be a mother, sister, friend or carer, but none of these relations, however precious and valuable, fully captures the depth of her humanity. Our creaturely relationships are fluid and no creaturely relationship comprehends the mystery of our humanity and all its possible manifestations. Yet through those relations we learn about, and participate in, our fundamental relation to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 'the one in whom we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17.28).

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<sup>35</sup> From 'In the Image and Likeness of God', a paper presented to IASCUFO, December 2018. Subsequent quotations are also from this paper

<sup>36</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a.38

Oliver's paper shows, then, that at the fundamental level, in the primary way in which we are human, we are equal because we all share this defining feature of our humanity, which is that our lives are a gift from God and are defined by that relationship which we are called to share eternally. The undermining of human dignity through unjust relationships between the genders, as well as through other unjust and inhuman relationships, is therefore deeply offensive to Christian teaching and the Christian way of life.

## 2. The calling of the Church

What is the place and role of the Church within the gift relationship of humanity with God? A clear and concise ecumenical answer is provided by a recent document from the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.<sup>37</sup> It begins at the same place as above, with a description of how in the beginning, man and woman were created in the image of the Triune God, thus bearing an inherent capacity for communion with God and with one another. The document goes on to describe how God's purpose in creation was thwarted by human sin and disobedience, which damaged the relationships between God and human beings, between human beings, and between humans and the created order.

But God persisted in faithfulness despite human sin and error. The dynamic history of God's restoration of *koinonia* found its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. (TCTCV Section 1)

Following on from this, then, the Church finds its place and role:

'The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world'. (TCTCV Section 1)

A vital element in this mission of the Church comes from the biblical concept of communion or *koinonia*. The Greek noun *koinonia* derives from the verb meaning 'to have something in common', 'to share', 'to participate', 'to have part in' or 'to act together'. It appears in passages recounting the sharing in the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 10.16-17), reconciliation (Galatians 2.7-10), the collection for the poor (Romans 15.26; 2 Corinthians 8.3-4) and the experience and witness of the Church (*cf* Acts 2.42-45) (Section 13). Thus, life in communion is one of justice and peace. The Church, then, is called *to make visible the irrevocable gift of God's communion within the human family, and indeed, with the whole created order*.

At this point it is important to recognise that the Church's mission is impaired whenever the Christian community denies, distorts, or rejects the gift of communion in its life and witness by initiating or perpetuating unjust relations inherent in racism, economic injustice, warfare, and gender injustice. The painful history of Christian disunity belongs to such a deformation of communion. Unjust relations between women, men, girls and boys, are also part of it: they

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<sup>37</sup> Commission on Faith and Order, WCC Publications 2013. With thanks to the Revd Canon Dr John Gibaut who prepared the following paragraphs based on ecclesiological insights in the report. The text of the report can be accessed at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

must be recognised at the most basic level of ecclesial community as distorted *koinonia*. Like Christian disunity, the denial of communion between women and men impedes the fundamental mission of the Church as the sign and servant of God's design for the world: the communion of all under the reign of Christ (cf TCTCV Section 25).

On the other hand, the full, visible *koinonia* between women and men in a sacramental relationship of justice and peace in the Church is a particular way that Christians proclaim that:

Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing (TCTCV Section 1).

### 3. The calling of the Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion finds its identity and calling in this gift of communion. Anglicans do not belong to a union of churches but to a communion of churches. Hence the Communion is not a global corporation with a single legal and financial structure governed by a head office, but a communion of autonomous and interdependent churches that through prayers, fellowship and mission actively share their Anglican faith. This implies that they do not exist in a fixed state with each other but, rather, need continually to re-establish what they hold in common out of the differences and diversity that they embody. To be a 'communion' implies an ongoing process of finding what is held in common from within the diversity of Anglican life across the globe.

For example, there are not one but four instruments of the Communion: the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' meetings and the Anglican Consultative Council. Like a varied set of musical instruments, these different organisations need to be played with each other if they are to produce a symphony of music. These instruments aim to promote *koinonia* among the member churches and share common witness, mission and evangelism in the global context. The instruments are parts of the structure of polity of the Communion and also gatherings of human agents in particular sets of relationship.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to these formal institutions, *koinonia* is also manifested in a host of informal links and connections across the Communion, between dioceses, parishes, agencies and individuals. Human interaction is at the heart of what it means to belong to the Anglican Communion, against the background of extraordinary and wonderful difference and diversity, not least in the expression and understanding of gender. This interaction should be about continually finding and treasuring what each other has in common.

To this end, Anglicans have been engaged in discussion of gender from its beginning. In the nineteenth century, the debates focused on polygamy as Christian mission encountered diverse understandings of gender and different forms of family, marriage and sexual practices. In the late nineteenth century, the issue of divorce and 'sexual purity' was contested and the question of how to treat divorcees in the church became a recurrent issue in the twentieth

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<sup>38</sup> *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*, IASCUFO 2015, p.83



century. In the 1920s and 1930s the focus was on birth control and contraception. Since 1978, the discussion of homosexuality and same sex marriage has been raised in each of the Lambeth Conferences that have taken place.<sup>39</sup>

The discussion of gender has always been difficult because of cultural, religious, national, regional differences and diverse understanding of the Bible and theological traditions. But the greater the differences, the greater the potential for deep and meaningful communion, though the danger of misunderstanding and prejudice is also present. Christopher Craig Brittain and Andrew McKinnon in their recent ethnographic study of the Anglican Communion write:

There is no question that disagreement can be destructive or distracting to the mission of the church, but conflict is not necessarily unhelpful in and of itself.<sup>40</sup>

They cite George Simmel's classic study of conflict to argue that conflict and disagreement provide much of the dynamism and energy of social life, and offer possibilities for organisations to adapt to new situations.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Bible in the Life of the Church project**

Conversations and contestations across the Anglican Communion concerning both gender and sexuality have made it apparent that Anglicans interpret scripture differently. Recognising the different interpretive Bible-reading practices among Anglicans gave rise to 'The Bible in the Life of the Church' project in 2009. This project has been an initiative both to understand how the Bible is interpreted in particular Anglican contexts and to facilitate respectful engagement across different Anglican interpretive practices.

How we read the Bible is clearly an important component of a Communion-wide dialogue in our work towards just relationships between women and men, girls and boys. Following the exhortation of 1 Peter 3: 15, we should always be willing to offer an account of how we read scripture when asked, yet with gentleness and reverence.

A wide variety of resources gathered or commissioned by the Bible in the Life of the Church project is available in an on-line Tool Box at <http://bit.ly/2GtI5zs>.

Other sections in these study materials show how unjust relationships between women and men, girls and boys need to be overcome. This is true within the Anglican Communion as well as beyond it. The seeking of *koinonia* needs to include a commitment to the kind of justice that gives everyone the freedom and opportunity to choose to enter into it. The following kinds of initiative have become central to this:

- promoting gender equality and the participation of women in all levels of decision-making throughout the Anglican Communion

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Jane Shaw, 'Bonds of Affection? Debates on Sexuality', in *Anglican Women on Church and Mission*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan et al. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013

<sup>40</sup> On this see especially Christopher Craig Brittain and Andrew McKinnon, *The Anglican Communion at a Crossroads: The Crises of a Global Church*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018, p.146. See Chapter 5 as a whole, 'National Structures, Global Structures, and the Ties That Bind'

<sup>41</sup> George Simmel, *Conflict: The Web of Group-Affiliations*. New York: Free Press, 1955

- sharing the stories of women in the Anglican Communion
- supporting and accompanying Anglicans and others who are working to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence, including human trafficking
- advocating access for all women and girls to education and health care, including reproductive and maternal health care and resources
- advocating the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and environmental abuse.<sup>42</sup>

The Anglican Communion is called to live out *koinonia* in the midst of global changes, rising nationalism, political realignment, and cultural and religious conflicts. If it replaces unjust with just relationships between all its members it can become a beacon of hope for a divided and fragmented world. If Anglicans can learn to listen and respect each other's deeply-held faith, while searching for ways to find just and lasting communion based on the relationship of gift exchange, it will fulfil its calling and bear powerful witness to the Gospel.

### Questions for discussion

1. 'Rather than locate the divine image solely in an essential human quality or characteristic, we may look first to God and the divine call to the whole of humanity.' How does this statement transform our understanding of the place and importance of gendered and other differences within humankind?
2. 'The Church is called to make visible the irrevocable gift of God's communion within the human family, and indeed, with the whole created order.' How might the church in your context bring this to clear and rich expression?
3. How can unjust relationships between the genders in your part of the Anglican Communion be overcome and a true and lasting *koinonia* be found?

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<sup>42</sup> Priorities of the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN), <https://iawn.anglicancommunion.org>

## Section 7: Transformative manhood and womanhood

### Aims:

- To learn about Jesus as a model of transformative manhood.
- To learn about women's leadership in the New Testament and transformative womanhood.
- To understand religious leaders' roles in promoting transformative manhood and womanhood.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 3.38*

Today, traditional gender norms and expectations are undergoing rapid changes because of globalisation, information technology and social media. A growing number of women and men, especially those belonging to the younger generation, have found rigid gender norms and stereotypes limiting and unfair. To confront gender inequality and gender-based violence, we need to develop new understandings of manhood and womanhood in the church and society, so that men and women will work together for social change. We can learn from the Bible because it offers many insights on transformative manhood and womanhood.

### Jesus as a model of transformative manhood

Christians believe that Jesus serves as a role model for full humanity. The Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds were patriarchal and had a clear bias toward maleness. Rule and authority were widely considered to be male prerogatives and men were deemed to have the necessary qualities for leadership, such as initiative, reason and courage. Men with property and power ruled over women, slaves, minors and other men with less power. Women were thought to be better fitted for domestic duties and had the requisite virtues of modesty and hard work. The majority of women were politically and socially powerless and subject to suppression and abuse, while a minority were able to negotiate the world and make contributions to public life.

Despite this, Jesus himself had an extraordinary way of relating to women on equal terms, unusual in his day. His vision of the kingdom or reign of God resulted in a community of equals gathered around him, women as well as men, many of whom left their homes and possessions to follow him. The Gospels in different ways testify to the remarkable freedom Jesus had in relating to women as persons, as disciples, and as leaders.

Jesus was brought up in a Jewish home and followed many Jewish customs when he grew up. His society was divided between the rich and the poor and between Jews and Gentiles. Jewish culture in Jesus' time was diverse and not monolithic. Jesus himself had an extraordinary way of relating to women on equal terms, unusual in his day.

## Transformational leadership

Jesus knew that his mission to bring about God's Kingdom would not be an easy one and he could not accomplish it alone. He called the disciples and began a reform movement by forming an alternative community around him. Among his followers were women and men, Jews and Gentiles. In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by wealth and power, but he resisted the temptation and retreated from the crowd and those around him to pray and rest. Jesus was not afraid of showing his emotions. When he saw Lazarus' family and friends crying because they thought Lazarus was dead, he wept (John 11.33-35). He lamented over the fate of Jerusalem and wanted to gather its children as a hen gathered her brood under her wings (Matthew 23.37). Jesus' ministry was inclusive and he invited children to come to him. The crowd who followed Jesus often sided with him and not with the ruling class, showing that there were men around Jesus who challenged the status quo. Jesus died on the cross and showed the vulnerability of his way of being a leader. Before his death, he shared the last supper with his disciples and charged his followers to carry on his mission. Jesus demonstrated servant leadership and a different kind of authority and did not draw praise for himself but gave glory to God.

### Breaking cultural taboo

In Jesus' time, a Jewish man was not supposed to speak to a Gentile woman, especially someone with a questionable reputation. Jesus broke the taboo by talking to the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4.1-42). The Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands and was living with another man, was so inspired that she went back to her town and spread the news about the Messiah. Many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. On another occasion, Jesus healed a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years (Luke 8.43-48). The woman had a stigmatised illness and was ashamed to ask Jesus to heal her. She only touched the fringe of Jesus' clothes, but Jesus acknowledged her in the crowd. He said, 'Daughter your faith has made you well'. In so doing he recognised the woman's agency. These Gospel stories show that Jesus crossed religious and social boundaries and his good news was for all people.

### Taking women seriously

Jesus respected his mother Mary and when the wine ran out at the wedding at Cana, Jesus performed his first miracle turning water into wine upon Mary's intercession (John 2.1-11). As a teacher who travelled from place to place, Jesus accepted the hospitality of men and women who provided food and nourishment for him. When he visited the home of Martha and Mary, Martha was busy with her domestic roles taking care of the guest, but Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he was saying. When Martha asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her, Jesus praised Mary's choice instead (Luke 10.38-42). The story shows that a woman's role is not limited to domesticity. They can also learn the Gospel and teach others. In another instance, a Syrophenician woman came and begged Jesus to heal her daughter. At first, Jesus said that God's grace was for the Jewish people. When the woman persisted, he changed his mind and healed her daughter because of the woman's faith (Matthew 15.21-28; Mark 7.24-30). Jesus appreciated women who persisted, took the initiative, and made decisions.

## Advocating justice for women

Jesus paid attention to his social environment and the lives of women around him. Jesus did not overlook women's domestic roles, such as baking bread (Matthew 13.33) and sweeping the house to search for a lost coin (Luke 15.8) and included them in his parables about the Kingdom of God. He was against a man divorcing his wife, except for unchastity (Matthew 19.3-9). In his patriarchal culture, a man could send his wife a certificate of dismissal and divorce her. Society would look down on a divorced woman and she might lose her means of support. Jesus also showed understanding and compassion for a woman caught in adultery. The scribes and Pharisees brought the woman before Jesus but not the man who had had sex with her. When they cited the Mosaic law, which said that such a woman should be stoned, Jesus said that whoever had not sinned could cast the first stone. One by one they all left, for they knew they had also sinned. Jesus did not condemn the woman and asked her not to sin again (John 8.1-11). Many societies judge women more harshly than men, and in this example, Jesus forgave the woman and criticised the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

The Gospels portray Jesus as a prophet who challenged social injustice, including prejudice and discrimination against women. During his time, manhood and womanhood were defined in a web of social relations that determined superiority and inferiority. As an iconoclastic social prophet, Jesus called for a renunciation of the web of social relationships by which his society had defined privilege and status.<sup>43</sup> Jesus denounced the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and other religious leaders and befriended sinners and tax collectors. He taught, healed, and restored women to dignity and wholeness. He crossed social and religious boundaries by speaking with Gentile women, healing the Syrophenician woman's demon-possessed daughter, and showing sympathy to outcast women. His iconoclastic behaviour infuriated the crowd and even his disciples often could not understand him. Jesus' teaching and ministry pointed to the vision of a new humanity, and a model of transformative manhood. He showed that both women and men are created in the image of God and are partners in carrying out God's mission.

## Transformative manhood

Jesus' example challenges us to develop more helpful and life-giving ideas of what it means to be men. To address the devastating issues of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, new constructions of manhood are urgent and necessary. As long as men still think they have the right and power to control women's bodies and sexuality, gender justice will only be a dream. African scholars have produced anthologies entitled *Redemptive Masculinities* and *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Transformative Masculinities*, which explore dangerous constructions of manhood and envision new ways of constructing gender relations that will help address the prevalence of gender-based violence and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Christology and Feminism: Can a Male Savior Save Women', in *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 55-56

<sup>44</sup> Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, eds., *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012); and Ezra Chitando and Nyambura J Njoroge, eds., *Contextual Bible Study*

In his introduction to the Bible Study Manual, Ezra Chitando criticises biased views of manhood, such as male superiority, the lack of respect for women's human rights and feelings, the refusal to accept women's leadership, and the need to be always in control and remain highly competitive. The assumption that male prowess is shown by having as many female sexual partners as possible has led to sexual abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Instead, Chitando encourages the nurturing of 'gender equitable men' in the communities. These men and boys would be caring and sensitive; respect women, children and other men; remain faithful in relationships; allow their partners space to be independent and grow; use dialogue and not force to resolve conflicts; use respectful language toward women and children; share in household chores and parenting; accept women's leadership, and confront sexual and gender-based violence whenever they encounter it.

Since many countries in the Anglican Communion have gone through a lengthy history of colonialism, war, violence, dictatorship, and racial and ethnic conflicts, it is important to investigate how political and social oppression have left their impact on the psychic of men and boys. When men who are subjugated in the public sphere feel their manhood has been diminished, they sometimes act out their anger and frustration on women and children in private. In order to develop transformative manhood, the social systems and institutions that perpetuate violence and domination must be challenged and changed. There must be opportunities for the psychic wounds and scars of men and boys to be healed, so that they will learn to respect others, including women and children.

Religious leaders can play important roles in promoting transformative manhood. In many societies, religion has been a part of the cultural system that justifies male superiority and the abuse of women. Some men have appealed to sacred texts, which they think give them license to dominate women. Therefore, religious leaders have to serve as role models of transformative masculinity and promote new understandings of manhood through their preaching and teaching. They must reinterpret the sacred texts to promote gender equality and respect for women and girls. They can also use existing structures, such as Sunday School, youth fellowship, and men's and women's groups, to inculcate ideals of transformative manhood. Through outreach programmes, publications, and working with non-governmental agencies, religious leaders can promote new ideas of transformative manhood.

## Women as disciples and leaders in the New Testament

In addition to Jesus' example as transformative manhood, the New Testament shows that women played very strong and important roles in early Christianity. The first three Gospels present women as models of discipleship and followers of Jesus, who stay with him on his journey to the cross, even when his male disciples desert him (Mark 15.40-41). Luke tells us that these women are among Jesus' disciples from Galilee and that they minister to Jesus, making possible his ministry through their acts of service (Luke 8.1-3). While these Gospels speak of an inner group of twelve disciples or apostles, they are also aware of an unnumbered

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*Manual on Transformative Masculinity* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa, 2013), [http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/manuals/EHAIA\\_Transformative\\_Masculinity\\_English.sflb.ashx](http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/manuals/EHAIA_Transformative_Masculinity_English.sflb.ashx)

group of women who have a special relationship to Jesus: an inner group of men and an inner group of women. Luke names the women as Mary Magdalene, Joanna (who is connected to the royal court), and Susanna. Mark mentions another Mary, and also Salome who may be the mother of the apostles, James and John.

John's Gospel is more concerned with individual encounter with Jesus than with groups and so his focus is on Jesus' meeting with a number of individual women who come to faith in him, sometimes through doubt and struggle. At the beginning of the Gospel, the mother of Jesus plays a part in commencing Jesus' ministry, declaring her faith in his word and, at the end, the dying Jesus gives her to the beloved disciple as his mother (2.5; 19.25-26). The Samaritan woman comes to find in Jesus the source of living water and quenching her deep thirst for life (4.1-42). Martha and Mary discover that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and confess their faith in him through word and deed (11.25-27; 12.3-8).

### **Mary Magdalene as a woman disciple**

The most prominent among the women disciples in John and in the other Gospels, apart from the mother of Jesus, is Mary Magdalene. Nowhere in the New Testament is she portrayed as a prostitute. This identification was an unfortunate error in the early centuries of the Western church. A significant element in the description of Mary in the Gospels is her second name, 'Magdalene'. This is generally taken to be a reference to her place of origin, a village in Galilee called 'Magdala' on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'tower' and it is likely that 'Magdalene' is a nickname given to her by Jesus, indicating something of her character as a 'tower of strength'. Jesus similarly gives nicknames to Simon ('Peter', Mark 3.16/Matthew 10.2; Matthew 16.18), and to James and John ('Boanerges' or 'sons of thunder', Mark 3.17). If so, it emphasises Mary's importance as a leader in the movement around Jesus.

Mary's true role, however, is that of witness to the resurrection, a portrait that is given her in Mark and Matthew but most significantly in John. There Mary struggles to find the body of Jesus and discovers instead, to her joy, her living Lord, recognising the voice of the Good Shepherd calling her name. It is to her that Jesus first gives the proclamation of the good news of his resurrection and she faithfully proclaims it to the other disciples (John 20.1-18). The later church gave Mary the title of 'apostle to the apostles', emphasising her apostolic role and her significance in the spread of the good news. She is the first to see and fully to believe, the first to be given the commission, the first to announce Jesus' triumph over death. Her joyful announcement, 'I have seen the Lord!' (20.18), is the formal Christian proclamation of the resurrection as well as the deeply personal experience on which it is based.

### **Paul and baptism**

Paul's writings have been used to justify women's second-class status in church and society. Some would see Paul as a misogynist, someone who had problems with women and their leadership, unlike Jesus. Yet this is far from being the case. Apart from anything else, Paul had a significant number of women colleagues who worked in ministry and mission alongside him. In one place, he mentions nine women who include the theologian, Prisca (Priscilla)—along with her husband Aquila—the deacon; Phoebe, who worked in Corinth as a patron of the church and

was commissioned to take the Letter to the Romans to Rome on Paul's behalf, and also the apostle, Junia, along with her husband, Andronicus (Romans 16.3,16). For many years, it was questioned whether a woman could be an apostle, but there is no longer any doubt that the apostle's name was 'Junia', a common female name, and not 'Junias', a male name that never appears in the ancient world. Even John Chrysostom in the fourth century recognised her as an apostle.

Paul's core statement about the nature and implications of Christian baptism in Galatians 3.26-29 is even more important theologically than Paul's impressive list of female co-workers:

...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

For Paul, there is a new identity in belonging to Christ, a new status as adult children of God, which is symbolised above all in baptism. It is baptism that makes us children of God through which we also become children of Abraham, belonging within the covenant community of God's people. In baptism we enter into Christ and take on his identity.

From this Christology flow radical implications for the believing community. Though being a Jew and a male, from a specific socio-economic class and geographical region, Christ through the resurrection can embrace all human beings, gathering them into his identity. Baptism, therefore, signifies the new identity given in and through Christ. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of baptism as dying with Christ in order to rise with him. The whole pattern of Christian living is one where believers daily die to the old order of things and rise to the new:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6.3-4).

The death and resurrection of Christ make possible a new and transformed way of life, in opposition to the old order of sin, violence, oppression, domination and death.

One further aspect is important here. Paul is aware of the Genesis tradition, from the first creation account where, on the sixth day, women and men are created in the image of God (Genesis 1.26-27). What this means is that the same original equality of men and women, before the Fall, is now restored in Christ. Women need no longer be submissive and subservient to men but can take their full place within the Christian community as those who have been created in the divine image and re-made in the image of Christ.

### **Other Pauline texts**

The rest of the Pauline writings need to be set within the context of this key passage in Galatians. Some of the difficult texts that seem to support male headship in the home and the silence of women in the church need to be read with new eyes. Not all the texts say what interpreters have assumed down through the ages. For example, though 1 Corinthians 11.2-16



is a difficult passage to understand at some levels, it is clear that Paul sees women as able to participate fully and vocally in worship, including being given the highest gift of all, that of prophecy. They have their own *authority* to speak in the gathered assembly (11.10).

What about texts such as 1 Timothy 2.11-15 which seem to silence women's leadership in the church and condemn them to silent submission to male authority? This text has been used to oppress women. A generous reading might suggest that it is quietness that is called for here, not silence. And the text does not state that women are to submit to their husbands but more likely means the kind of submission every Christian should cultivate in listening to the word of God.

Another way of reading this passage is thus as follows: 'Let a woman learn in a quiet and submissive fashion. But I do not permit her to teach with the intent to dominate a man. She must be gentle in her demeanour.' This way of reading the text also fits with the letter's concern for those who support false teaching. Women putting forward erroneous views in a contentious spirit are instructed to cultivate a quiet and receptive openness to apostolic teaching. This does not exclude them from leadership or authority.

The other major feature of the Pauline letters is found in those passages often called the 'household codes'. These are instructions for Christian living within the household in a context where Christians are struggling to survive in the world of Roman imperial power. These texts may seem less radical to us than other texts but in fact they are attempting to protect Christians and to tone down those aspects of the Gospel which are simply too radical for their society. Thus, they assume slavery and the submission of wives to their husbands, attempting to soften these structures and give them a Christian face (eg, Colossians 3.18-4.11; Ephesians 5.22-6.9; see also 1 Peter 2.13-3.7).

We need also to bear in mind that females married very young in the ancient world, often in their early teens and to husbands perhaps twice their age. These men would have been much better educated than their wives, with more life experience and knowledge. For a young girl to obey her older and more mature husband in that context makes more sense than it does today in many modern contexts, where wives are of similar age, life experience and level of education as their husbands. What we need to draw from these passages is not an imperative to copy the patterns of the ancient world but rather to draw out the biblical principles of mutual submission and self-giving love within marriage.

The Bible, and in particular the New Testament, attests to the equality and mutuality of women and men within the home and the life of the church. The figure of Mary Magdalene needs to be re-discovered, as do the many other women of Jesus' ministry and of Paul's mission. Mary's calling to proclaim the risen Christ is a vocation experienced by women as well as by men. She, and her sisters, need no longer feel themselves enslaved to patterns of male domination and authority. They are set free in Christ to become their true selves as daughters of God and sisters of Christ, remade in his image. This is the core message of biblical teaching on women.

## Transformative Womanhood

The New Testament points to the leadership of women, who were disciples alongside the male followers of Jesus. These women—as witnesses, teachers, missionaries, and leaders of house churches—helped to build the Jesus movement and the early church. They offer us insights and clues for the development of transformative womanhood, which recognises women’s dignity and supports the development of women’s full potential.

In the past, traditional interpretation of sin has focused on ‘pride’ or ‘will-to-power’, which reflect male experience in a way that is incongruent with the experience of many women. Women who have internalised society’s harmful gender norms and stereotypes have low self-esteem, defer to male authority figures, and often fail to take up appropriate leadership and responsibilities. They are taught to be selfless and to sacrifice for others, without knowing how to love and take care of themselves.

As the example of Mary Magdalene has shown us, both women and men are called to be partners in God’s mission. Women have equal responsibility to spread the Gospel and build up the church. Women and men need to build new relationships to strengthen our common humanity.

Maori Anglican theologian Jenny Plane Te Paa writes, ‘It is indeed mercy, kindness, humility, charity, patience, and love which are to characterise our human relationships, our ways of being with and for one another. . . Our life in Christ isn’t simply about ways of doing; it is, if it is to be ethically sound, also about our state of being’.<sup>45</sup>

Women can sometimes be the ones who hinder women’s advancement because they are more accustomed to men exercising leadership and authority. Women may judge other women more harshly than men. As such, they become inadvertent collaborators in patriarchal systems and perpetuate the cycle of violence. Instead of helping each other, women may become envious of one another and compete for male approval. In the story of Sarah and Hagar, Sarah mistreats Hagar after she bears Abraham a son. Transformational womanhood means that women would form sisterhood of mutual support in order to challenge deep-seated patriarchal privilege and systems.

Religious leaders can help foster new ideas of transformative womanhood by encouraging women to develop their leadership potential, offering education opportunities and professional development for women, and ensuring that women’s voices are represented in the church’s decision-making processes.

Girls should be brought up in the church with a healthy understanding of gender relationships, knowing that they will be treated with dignity and respect. The church has a long way to go to build a community that embraces women and men as equals and as full partners in mission.

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<sup>45</sup> Jenny Plane Te Paa, “‘Fourth’ Guessing the Spirit: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Global Anglicanism from an Indigenous Laywoman”, *Anglican Theological Review* 90:1 (2008): 131

'From the vantage point of 2000 years, we who claim to have moved past Calvary, past the empty tomb and beyond the garden can, by our daily living of the Baptismal Covenant – with all of its implications for peace with justice and respecting the dignity of every human being – help others to have meaningful encounters with the Risen Lord'.

*From a sermon by Bishop Barbara Harris, the first woman bishop in the Anglican Communion, preached at a service commemorating the life of the Revd Florence Li Tim-Oi, the first female priest in the Communion, 6 May 2007.<sup>46</sup>*

## Questions for discussion

1. What is the cultural understanding of manhood and womanhood in your context?
2. How can Jesus' model of manhood inspire us to change our gender relationships?
3. What can we learn about discipleship from women in the New Testament and what are the implications for today?

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<sup>46</sup> 'Sermon by Bishop Barbara Harris', The Anglican Church of Canada, 6 May 2007, <https://www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/li-tim-oi/harris>

## Section 8: Living out just gender relationships in our ministries

### Aims

- To understand the Five Marks of Mission in relation to how to engage in living out just relationships within this mission framework.
- To recognise the importance of action, as well as words, and identify actions to work on.
- To be encouraged together to work together as women and men in order to bring about positive change for gender justice.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it for me.

*Matthew 25.40*

This section is intended to be highly interactive and take the form of a workshop, during which students bring their own skills, insights and networks to the task of addressing gender injustice, violence and abuse.

The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion<sup>47</sup> offer a framework for exploring and expressing an holistic approach to this. They are marks of being a healthy church that contributes to all aspects of God's mission in the world. A healthy church embraces all people, especially the vulnerable, as it 'takes in', 'takes stock', and 'takes action' to serve God's reign here on earth as it is in heaven.

All people are called to offer mission and ministry in the world, according to their gifts and talents. In the Gospels, Jesus calls us to act with those who are disadvantaged and who are seeking justice. Faith in action gives our world hope.

The mission of the church is the mission of Christ:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom/God's reign.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Held together, the Five Marks of Mission express the Anglican Communion's understanding of, and common commitment to, God's holistic and integral mission in the world. No one Mark of

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

Mission is more important than another; each contributes to the whole. However, looked at individually, they can give us headings for reflecting on a diverse range of faith in action.

The following are illustrative examples for faith in action that can lead to the transformation of gender inequalities in all spheres of life.

It is hoped that these examples will inspire discussion and give rise to more ideas that are relevant to the students' context. The important point here is that action is required as well as words – action that arises as a result of the threefold cycle (described in section 3) of analysing the gender context, re-reading scripture to discern what God intends, and moving to action for transformation and change.

It is suggested that each Mark of Mission should be considered and discussed in small groups, with the setting out of some clear, achievable plans of action.

i) To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom/God's reign

Women and men working together to:

- study and revisit scripture that has been used to justify the abuse of women or restrict them in proclaiming the good news
- write and deliver Bible studies, bringing different perspectives to the texts
- share in preaching the Word
- share stories of faith and culture
- offer testimonies
- review periods of church history in light of gender justice
- consider what good news means for different groups of people
- pray together, and model living the Gospel of love.

ii) To teach, baptise and nurture the new believers

Women and men working together to:

- write teaching material for baptism or marriage preparation that takes into account justice issues
- model co-leadership in teaching, rooted in positive biblical examples
- walk alongside new believers and create safe spaces for new expressions of mission
- offer nurture according to context and need
- live with the questions rather than providing all the answers
- recognise that gender influences our teaching of theology and ecclesiology.

iii) To respond to human need by loving service

Women and men working together to:

- take responsibility in the home and caring services
- walk alongside the poor, the lonely, the sick, the marginalised and those who struggle. For example, work with government and other agencies in working toward eliminating human trafficking and slave labour

- recognise gender norms and stereotypes and their effects
- change unjust structures by challenging the social norms that limit human flourishing
- consider how churches can create safe space for survivors of sexual violence and gender-based abuse
- offer deep listening for understanding, healing and reconciliation

iv) To seek to transform unjust structures of society

Women and men working together to:

- encourage men to stand up for women who are marginalised and abused, and women to stand up for men who work outside gender stereotypes
- implement safe church policies and practices<sup>48</sup>
- encourage men to give space for women in the public arena and women to give space for men in the domestic arena
- ensure shared decision-making and leadership
- recognise and reconsider the language for humanity and for God that excludes women and girls
- enable men to mentor boys to improve self-understanding and raise consciousness on the effects of harmful gender stereotypes that drive abuse and exclusion
- equip women to mentor girls to improve self-understanding and raise consciousness on their potential
- celebrate and work positively with gender differences.

v) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Women and men working together to:

- consider the impacts of your lifestyle on climate change and the environment
- learn about or develop new initiatives that contribute positively to the earth's sustainability
- challenge authorities and businesses that do not take the care of the earth seriously
- find ways of greening your local environment
- make plans to mark the annual Season of Creation in a variety of ways.<sup>49</sup>

## Questions for discussion

1. What can you do in your own life and ministry to reflect just relationships between women and men, girls and boys?
2. In your community and more broadly, what practical steps and achievable goals can you envisage, in seeking just relationships between women and men, girls and boys as an integral part of mission? With whom do you need to work to take this forward?

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<sup>48</sup> See the materials developed by the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission at <http://bit.ly/2qCyPz5>

<sup>49</sup> See the resources at <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org/resources/season-of-creation.aspx>

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# Notes







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