**NE Reg SG conf – Theology of SG report 1/2/22**

**Notes**

SLIDE 1

**SLIDE 2**

6.3) All Are Welcome:

The idea that ‘All are welcome’ makes a statement about God’s love and grace. Yet boundaries help to ensure that people are safe, which sometimes means restricting those who enter a particular space. There is a need for discipline for those who damage the integrity of the Church and obstruct human flourishing. We must hold in tension the desire for safer spaces in our churches and the Church’s mission to welcome those who may pose a risk but have expressed commitment to change.

SLIDE 3

SLIDE 4

**SLIDE 5**

A bit of background as this is the first of three sessions on the report.

But you will see the question of inappropriate behavior and maintaining acceptable boundaries comes up in our history time and time again

SLIDE 6

SLIDE 7

SLIDE 8

SLIDE 9

SLIDE 10

SLIDE 11

SLIDE 12

**SLIDE 13**

Introduction:

Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the Methodist Church and a part of its response and witness to the love God in Jesus Christ. This report seeks to explore the theology and practices that undergird and support the safeguarding work of the Methodist Church and that help the Methodist people to create safer spaces for human flourishing.

1) Theological Roots:

God wants all human beings to flourish. Safeguarding is about working together to prevent and reduce both the risks and experience of abuse and neglect. God does not intend people to suffer from abuse and works with us to end the damage and trauma it causes. The reality of the human condition is that people abuse power, sin and wrong others. Safeguarding is an intrinsic part of the church’s participation in God’s mission and one way in which members of the Church demonstrate their care for each other and all they encounter.

1. Abuse and the human condition:

The long-lasting, catastrophic impact of being abused upon those who experience abuse includes shame, issues of identity and value. The trauma of abuse is bound up with abuse of power and betrayal of trust, severely impairing an abused person’s ability to trust and form healthy relationships, and can affect an individual’s relationship with God. In spiritual abuse, the abuser deploys spiritual language, symbolism and concepts as part of their coercion of the abused and justification for their actions. It is a topic which is particularly hard for many Christians to consider because it cuts at the heart of the gospel message of love and grace. The Methodist Church has, at times, contributed to the abuse and exploitation of vulnerable people, not least through its use of power and should seek to change its pattern of behaviour accordingly.

3) Theological thinking and how it is used:

The way in which God is understood and spoken of impacts on human relationships. Many people who abuse have used distorted interpretations of biblical texts and theological themes to justify their behavior.

4) Failure to challenge inappropriate and unacceptable behavior and maintain appropriate interpersonal boundaries:

The Past Cases Review noted the culture of an organisation is a critical factor in ensuring that it is a safe organisation. A naïve adoption of the narratives of reconciliation, unity and discipleship as living a life of love, kindness, grace and self-sacrifice, particularly in the context of the discourse of obedience, submission and hierarchical patterns of relating can lead to a culture of ‘niceness’ where people are not to be upset and bad behavior is to be understood and excused. Peace and unity can be mistakenly emphasised at the expense of justice.

Yet challenging harmful behavior and different forms of abuse and injustice is part of discipleship. Personal responsibility is needed, as well as robust accountability for personal discipleship. Those in authority must recognize the boundaries of their own power and responsibility. It can be difficult to apply respectful uncertainty to people we know to have also done good. A community which is able to discuss difficult issues in appropriate ways is more able to be a place of welcome for those who are vulnerable and who have been marginalised, including people who have experiences sexual abuse.

4.7) The use of symbols in the context of worship:

Using symbols such as God the father, or God as a lover can be triggering to some survivors. Touch can be problematic, such as in sharing the peace, laying on of hands or kneeling down for Communion. Consent should always be gained and consideration should be given of the impact on survivors of traditional or typical practices.

4.8) Life-giving resources for theological reflection:

Images of God looking after them, fighting for them and caring for them, can be helpful to survivors. Stories in the Bible of violence against women can help survivors by interpreting them on behalf of the victims.

5) Welcoming people who have experienced abuse:

More time, energy and resources have been given by the Methodist Church to enabling people who have abused to be welcomed into our churches, than people who have been abused. The profound and long-term trauma of abuse distorts the image of God and causes deep pain and suffering. Pastoral responses can be impaired when the person who has experienced abuse fails to live up to the idealised image of an innocent victim and the Church fails to respond well to the actual, complex and broken, person in profound pain.

**SLIDE 14**

* The all are welcome is not a free for all
* It comes with roles and responsibilities
* The welcome of Jesus to the sinner is a ‘yes’ but to go and sin no more – it is not a free ticket to carry on
* The Church has focused too narrowly on the offender – from 2000 Covenants of Care to SG contracts and MSGs. Trail-blazing stuff but only dealing with one part of the problem
* The place of the survivor has not received the same attention – or respect. Often dealt with suspicion and lack of belief
* My own history of church SG work and the original Catholic meeting with Richard McKay and prison chaplaincy.
* And I have been so indebted to the MSAG for what they have taught me about the perspective of survivors and how the story – the lived experience - continues
* So what have we done/ are doing to enable All being welcome in a way that is safe for everyone?

SLIDE 15

SLIDE 16

SLIDE 17