

Creating Safer Space

Foundation Module 2016 Edition

CASE STUDIES

Introduction: These case examples are based on situations that have arisen within different churches. To protect confidentiality, details have been altered and, wherever possible, the details of two or three real-life situations have been mixed together.

Read the case example. Then think about and make brief notes on each of the following:

- What is it in the case example you **recognise** that concerns you?
- How would you **respond** to your concern?
- What would you **record**?
- To whom would you **refer** this?

When you are thinking about your answers to the questions be open to the **feelings** that each example evokes.

1. Your church runs a number of community action groups from its premises including a day centre for people with mental health problems. **Sylvita**, who occasionally attends the day centre, confides in you that last year one of the workers had a relationship with her in which he was abusive.
2. You are a pastoral visitor and regularly meet with an 80-year-old woman, **Jean**, who is housebound and seems to be severely depressed. On one visit Jean tells you that she is scared of her neighbour. You know that the neighbour has been Jean's informal carer, for a number of years, since her husband died. When you try to find out more, Jean tells you she has been feeling very low. She says she doesn't want you to do anything about her neighbour.
3. You are a youth club worker. One day **Leah** (aged 14), who attends the club regularly, tells you she is very unhappy at home. She says she has a secret about her stepfather but does not want anyone to know. She asks if she can email or send text messages to you about him as it is too embarrassing to talk about. She says that you must promise not to tell anyone else what she is going to write about.
4. **John and Jane** are in their early 30s. Both have learning difficulties and have attended the church since their teenage years. They met at the youth club and have been living together for four years. Adult social care and the church community have given them a great deal of support. However their relationship is in difficulty and they have recently separated. You run the lunch club that both Jane and John have attended regularly. Jane has told you that John was violent towards her, but the minister suspects that Jane has been the more violent partner. The police have been informed but are taking no action. Jane tells you that she wants the church to stop John from attending church when she is there. John is not dealing well with the separation and seems to need the support of the church.

5. **Martin** and his wife are active in their local church. Martin is also a local preacher. You are the Church Council secretary. You have asked to borrow Martin's laptop to make a presentation at the Council, as the church one is not working and Martin has his with him, having come straight from work. He is reluctant to agree, and makes great effort to avoid the screen being seen by anyone. However, as you look over his shoulder to scroll through the items on your memory stick, you see an icon in the corner of the screen with a filename 'kiddie pics'. You don't mention it to anyone tonight, but when you go home you become increasingly anxious about what might be on the computer.
6. **James** is due to be released from prison after serving a sentence for indecent assault of his daughter. In prison he has become an active Christian. From the Web he has found out about different churches in the town where he will be living, and has selected yours. The prison chaplain contacts the minister to see whether he can hope to find a welcome at the church, and what arrangements need to be put in place. You are a steward, a parent of two teenage children, and the minister shares this information with you at a stewards' meeting.
7. **Rebecca**, a local preacher on trial, is married to **Peter** and has two young children. Peter works in a pressurised, well-paid, banking job which involves travelling away from home. As a consequence, Rebecca carries most of the child care and homemaking responsibilities and is not in paid employment. You are Rebecca's class leader and she has told you that Peter has become violent to her. He has always been very critical but this has developed from verbal to physical abuse. She does not think the children are aware of what is happening, but says there have been many rows with raised voices and smashed crockery. The physical violence is so far limited to some punches and kicks that have left no lasting harm or visible evidence. Rebecca fears that things will get worse.
8. **Ms King** brings **Vanessa**, aged eight, to the church. She says she is Vanessa's auntie and has been looking after her for a year. Ms King says Vanessa is a very naughty child and seeks advice from the minister about whether she is spirit-possessed and needing 'deliverance'. While Ms King talks with the minister, you are asked to look after Vanessa in the Sunday school. You notice that she seems very hungry, helping herself to all the biscuits on the plate and asking for more. When Ms King collects Vanessa you mention this. Her auntie says "this just shows how naughty she can be" and takes her home. As they leave the church, you can hear Ms King raising her voice and shouting at Vanessa.

New case studies (2016)

9. You are a children's worker at your church and have been asked to organise a children's half-term holiday club. You need to gather a team of people together to support it and you put out a request for help in the notices. Tom, who has only recently started to attend church comes forward after service one Sunday and offers. You don't know Tom that well apart from having seen him in church, but you accept and agree to be in touch to arrange a planning meeting. One of the other possible helpers then takes you to one side and tells you that you need to watch Tom as something happened in his past, but they didn't know exactly what.
10. You are a steward visiting another church in your circuit when you are approached by an elderly lady, **Florence**, who asks you about the historic organ at your church, and whether it would be possible for her adult son to come and play it. You explain to Florence that this is a matter for the stewards' team, but she presses you and explains that her son has not been very well of late, and this might do him some good. She says he might want to bring a friend.

11. You are a youth worker at your church and have organised a weekend away at a self-catering cottage in the country. It's a small mixed group of eight young people and another leader. On the way to the cottage in the minibus, **Dawn** (aged 15) tells you that her new boyfriend who has a cool new car did not want her to come on this weekend, but she had been looking forward to it and spending some time with her mates. Dawn tells you, light-heartedly, that he's a bit older than her and he thought she might get too friendly with a boy her own age in the group. Later that first night, you see her withdraw from the group campfire and study her new, latest model phone intently for a few minutes. When she comes back, she looks pale and says she feels ill and needs to go home.
12. You are a steward at your church and have noticed that an elderly man, **George**, who attends regularly for worship, has started to get into arguments with people who sit near him. The arguments seem to be about his comments on the number of hymn books now in use and his ever more vocal complaints about not being able to hear preachers or readers. You know George is hard of hearing and in the last year this has got worse. Last Sunday, the person sitting next to him asked him to keep quiet and he hit out at them. They backed away and were not hurt.
13. You are a pastoral visitor and regularly visit **Rita**, an elderly lady who lives in sheltered accommodation. On one visit she breaks down and tells you that she is very unhappy as her daughter keeps shouting at her, telling her she is stupid, and that she wants to control her finances. You have no reason to suspect that Rita is exaggerating or that her memory is confused given your previous conversations, so you express sympathy and then ask Rita what she would like you to do about it. She asks you not to tell anyone else and she doesn't want anything to happen as she is scared that if anyone finds out it will jeopardise the relationship she has with her daughter, her only close relative.
14. You are a pastoral visitor at Townville Methodist Church where **Andrew** is the presbyter with pastoral responsibility. He is married with young children. You know that Andrew is also very keen on pastoral visiting and sees it as a key element in his ministry. Andrew has recently started to visit **Chloe**, who is on your pastoral list, because she and her husband of 12 years have recently divorced on the grounds of having lived apart, acrimoniously, for a number of years. However when attending services over the last few weeks Chloe has started to become visibly upset. She has two children aged 11 and 7. Andrew has suggested to you that for the moment you leave the pastoral visiting to him as "it's quite complex and stressful" for Chloe at this time. You have noticed that Andrew has often given Chloe a hug at the end of services, but he hugs many people, including yourself when your father died last year. Last Wednesday morning, you saw them in the coffee shop at John Lewis. They did not see you, but Andrew was holding Chloe's hand across the table.
15. You are a Church Council member and a regular worshipper at a church where a new minister, **Mark**, started in September. He has preached three sermons so far, on each occasion stressing the literal truths of the Bible and strongly implying that anyone who has a different view to him is simply wrong. Mark is very different to your former minister, who was very liberal in his approach to Scripture and seemed to go out of his way to engage with fringe adherents of the church who were either not regular attenders, did not profess a strong faith or had a lot of questions. At the autumn Church Council Meeting, there was an opportunity to consider worship matters, and you plucked up the courage to ask Mark about his approach to preaching and what you perceive as his rigid interpretation of



Scripture. He replied by suggesting that unless you believe completely you won't be saved, there's no room for doubters, and that he will be strongly expecting all church members to attend Bible study programmes and join prayer cells over the next few months. A group of Church Council members took the opportunity to underline their strong support for Mark and his new ideas that will strengthen the faith of the congregation and make it an attractive place to join for local people who are seeking answers. The meeting concluded with you feeling rather confused.