

## Worship Service on Child Sexual Abuse

**Call to Worship** (adapted from excerpts of Psalm 31)

Be gracious to me, O God, for I am in distress.

**My eyes are weak with weeping, my soul and my body with grief.**

My life is consumed with sorrow and my years with groaning.

**My strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.**

All my fears rise up to mock me, my neighbors turn away.

**My friends dread to see me and flee from my sickness of soul.**

Still, I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."

**My life is in your hands; deliver me from the fears which separate me from life. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.**

**Opening Hymn** *God Weeps*<sup>1</sup> (Shirley Erena Murray)

### Statement of Intention

Today we gather to address the issue of child sexual abuse. We are here to right the wrong of the church's silence on this topic. We acknowledge that we have often ignored the plight of those who have fallen prey to predators who violate the young, the innocent, and the most vulnerable among us. We choose now to shed light on what has been kept in darkness for far too long, to offer healing to those both within and outside our church community. It is our desire to offer a safe place for those whose spiritual lives have been impacted by the wounds they bear in hopes that you may come to know a God who suffers with you, who longs to comfort you and bring you peace and hope for healing.

### Prayer of Confession

**We confess, O God, that we are a broken people. Our own wounds can sometimes make us blind to the wounds of others. We have isolated ourselves, failing to live out the call to community, to compassion, and to abiding love for all our brothers and sisters. Give us eyes to see the wounded among us, ears to listen to their stories, words to share Your comfort and reassurance, and shoulders strong enough to bear the tears and sorrows of your suffering ones. Amen.**

### Assurance of Pardon

In the name of Christ and for the world's sake, you are forgiven.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Faith We Sing* songbook, #2048

**In the name of Christ, you are forgiven.**

**Prayer Response** *Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying*<sup>2</sup> (Ken Medema)

### **Litany Prayer**

For those whose lives have been violated in body, mind, and soul by the sin of sexual abuse,  
**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For their loved ones, who walk with them, suffer with them, and struggle to find the right words and actions to help them,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the institutions and agencies who seek to foster healing for the victims and their families,  
**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For our society and the media that sexualize our young people before they are old enough to understand,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who turn a blind eye to the consequences of child sexual abuse,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For our local, state and national governments who have the power to create legislation that protects our children,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For our teachers and youth workers who stand on the front lines to protect those in their care, that they may recognize children who are vulnerable and dare to take action,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

For a world that values power over social justice, war over peace, the fulfillment of desire over the protection of the helpless,

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

God, we lift up these prayers to You with humility, sorrow, and hope in equal measure. Grant that we might live in ways that honor you and honor the survivors of this holocaust of the soul. May we be empowered to offer them comfort and a safe place to enter into Your presence.

**Amen.** (You may choose to follow this with the Lord's Prayer if desired.)

**Hymn** *Out of the Depths*<sup>3</sup> (Ruth Duck, lyrics; Robert J. Batastini, music)

**Scripture** John 4:4-26 The Woman at the Well

**Message Ideas:** Survivors of child sexual abuse have been sexualized from an early age and often have been given the message that sex is how one receives love. This can result in

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<sup>2</sup>*The Faith We Sing* songbook #2193

<sup>3</sup>*ibid*, #2136

promiscuity and serial sexual relationships. The fact that the Samaritan woman had five husbands and wasn't married to her current lover could be an indication that she was a victim of sexual abuse. The shame that led her to draw water during the heat of the day when other women weren't around is also indicative of an abuse survivor. She feared being the brunt of the women's scorn and judgment. Certainly she didn't feel worthy of Jesus' living water, though she clearly wanted it. When Jesus asked her to bring her husband, I'm sure she felt that her history would be a deal-breaker, and yet, Jesus seemed to know about her life and didn't count that against her. This can offer hope to survivors that God does not judge them, no matter what behaviors they have resorted to in order to cope with the pain of their abuse. God understands the "original wounds"<sup>4</sup> that led to these coping mechanisms, i.e. drinking, drugs, promiscuity, self-harm, etc. God also forgives and offers the "living water" of love, compassion, and belonging to the kingdom of heaven. The shame is so great for some survivors that they can't fathom the grace of God. This Bible story may be a way to break through the shame and offer them a glimpse of what it might be like to stand shameless in the presence of God.

**Offering** You might want to take a special offering that benefits a local organization that serves victims of sexual abuse and assault.

**Blessing and Anointing** While music plays, invite any who are in need of healing or whose lives have been touched by child sexual abuse (survivors, their family members, friends, teachers, co-workers, etc. or medical/mental health/legal professionals who work with survivors) to come forward for an individual blessing and anointing. By making the invitation this broad, it may help survivors not to feel "outed" by coming forward. And make sure you emphasize that this is optional. At the end you can pronounce a blessing for all those who didn't feel comfortable coming forward.

**Closing Hymn** *Blest Are They*<sup>5</sup> (David Haas)

**Benediction**

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<sup>4</sup> Elaine Heath, *"We Were the Least of These"*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *The Faith We Sing* songbook, #2155