

## ***The Cross of the Moment***

### **A report from the Boundary Breaking Research Project**

#### **Reading Guide**

**The Boundary Breaking research project explored the ecclesial and cultural implications of the child sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.**

The research took place from 2019-2023. The report based on the qualitative work was published in April 2024, titled *The Cross of the Moment*. You can download the digital version of the report from the Centre for Catholic Studies web pages: [Boundary Breaking - Durham University](#) either in the complete version or in separate chapters.

#### **How the report is structured**

*The Cross of the Moment* has four stages:

ONE	<b>Listening</b> to the voices and experience of those whose lives have been affected by abuse – particularly survivors, but also affected parish members, priests, bishops and religious.	<b>Chapters two, three, four and five</b> present these voices.
TWO	<b>Drawing out aspects of Catholic culture which need reflection:</b> noticing habits, attitudes and understandings that are implicated in how abuse happened and how the Church’s response has often been inadequate.	<b>Chapter six</b> explores seven themes: silences; ideas about the priest; clericalism; bystander perspectives; accountability and support; leadership; and confession, forgiveness and justice. This chapter also draws directly on the voices of participants.
THREE	<b>Going deeper:</b> exploring ideas from Catholic teaching and theology that are relevant to the cultural habits and understandings implicated in the abuse crisis.	<b>Chapter seven</b> opens up aspects of Catholic teaching we could re-visit or re-interpret in order to change aspects of our culture.
FOUR	<b>Turning to practical ways forward:</b> imagining some possible ways through which more could be done to learn from this crisis, and particularly from the experience of survivors.	<b>Chapter eight</b> sets out several pathways and practical steps that could be considered at various levels of the Church.

## **The invitation**

The invitation that the text extends is:

- to listen to the voices presented in the report;
- to consider the issues and questions raised by their experience;
- to reflect on what resonates with or challenges our experience and what we can learn from prayerful listening;
- to explore how the issues raised point to aspects of our Catholic faith and culture which might need re-thinking;
- to ponder what is asked of us as a whole Catholic community in our ongoing response to the abuse crisis.

The report models this process; it could be described as a discernment, because it listens and explores the meaning of what has happened, drawing on central aspects of Catholic faith and teaching. It is also a report that tries to imagine ways forward and suggests possible practical steps we could take at different levels of the Church.

In other words, the report invites readers to ask these questions:

- What can we learn about ourselves as a community from listening to the voices of people affected by the abuse crisis?
- Where is God's Spirit leading us through the experience of the abuse crisis, including how the response has often caused further harm?
- How do we need to change, to restore what has been broken, as far as we can?

## **Suggestions for reading**

This is a long text. For some people, it will not be easy reading. It is important to take time and consider what would work for you. You do not have to sit down and read from cover to cover. Use the text as a resource and explore the sections and themes which draw your interest.

### ***In personal reading***

- The most important thing about reading this report is to listen to the voices that spoke in the research. If you have limited time, just read the quotes from participants' voices, which are set out in purple, mainly in chapters two to six.
- The most important voices are those of survivors, presented in chapter two.
- If you have a bit more time, choose which set of voices from chapters three and four you would like to hear, and explore these. It might be parish communities; or priests; or women. Don't feel you have to read them all.
- You could also sample later parts of the text. Choose one of the seven sections in chapter six, for example, and one section from Chapter seven, and one of the three pathways in chapter eight.

### ***Take your own path according to your interests***

For example:

If you are interested in the voices and experience of survivors and what these mean, read:

- chapter two;
- section two and section seven from chapter six;
- section two in chapter seven;
- section two in chapter eight.

If you are interested in what this means for parish communities, read:

- section two in chapter two (because everyone should start with survivors' voices)
- section one in chapter three;
- section one and section four in chapter six;
- section four in chapter seven;
- section three in chapter eight.

### ***Reading with a group***

If you have the opportunity to read the report with a group, there are several possible approaches.

You could read it chapter by chapter and use the *conversation in the Spirit* method each time you meet. This method is explained on p.170. There is a useful resource describing the method on the School for Synodality website, [Conversation in the Spirit \(squarespace.com\)](https://www.squarespace.com)

If you use this method, the questions for each round of conversation could be:

- What does this chapter (or section) say to each of us about our life together as a Catholic community?
- What is the Spirit asking of us through and in our response to the abuse crisis?
- In what ways do we need to change?

Alternatively, divide the chapter up so that each group member reads one section. When you meet together, each person could be invited to summarise what moved or struck them most in what they read, and what they see as the most important points. You could then do a round of conversation in the Spirit using the second and third questions above.

You could also consider inviting group members to browse the full report and choose one section or theme that interests them and which they would be willing to present to the group. It does not matter whether every part of the report is covered or whether a particular order is followed. What matters is that people draw something from the report which generates good conversation.

### ***Listening to live voices***

Another approach is to read parts of the text and invite people with relevant experience or roles to talk with you about what it says. You could use [Listening with Love - Catholic Bishops' Conference \(cbcew.org.uk\)](https://www.cbcew.org.uk) as a companion resource.

You could also explore whether anyone who has been involved in safeguarding work in church settings might come and share a conversation. It is also valuable if any priests or deacons would

share their thoughts on how their ministry has been affected by the crisis, or any members of religious communities.

There is always immense value in listening to people whose lives have been directly affected. But this is a very sensitive area, as the report acknowledges on p.171. It is important to seek advice and ensure that any survivors whom you approach are offered support and are able to respond to any invitation without any pressure. Survivors may also wish to protect their own anonymity, and any group listening to them should be committed to regarding the conversation as confidential.

***Consider who else might be interested***

You could also think about who might be interested in reading some of the report with you. Parish safeguarding representatives, for example, might find it valuable. Parish council members might also find parts of the report relevant to their work, if they are trying to build greater collaboration and shared responsibility. Those involved in ministries of pastoral care and support, such as bereavement ministry or youth ministry may also be interested. Or you could advertise a reading group across a cluster or deanery of family of parishes and see who is interested. There are many Catholics who are troubled by the abuse crisis who may never have had an opportunity to listen, learn and reflect about it.