

Open Hearts: A guide to Inclusive Catholicism



A shared course from the Spirit Unbounded treasury of videos, brought to you by Root & Branch Community for Reform



1.2 Just a moment

O Great Spirit, help me always to speak the truth quietly, listen with an open mind when others speak, and remember the peace that may be found in silence.

1.3 Course Overview



- 8-week course to be run within small group settings.
- There are reflection and discussion points throughout the course.
- There is an opportunity for prayer, growth and sharing and this course has been prepared broadly in line with the ideas from the Vatican's Spiritual Conversations guidance.
[EN Step 6 Spiritual-Conversation.pdf \(synod.va\)](#)
- Course materials are all taken from the Spirit Unbounded October 2023 Lay-Led Synodal Assembly.
- Additional materials can be found here: [Spirit Unbounded – YouTube](#)
- [Speaker Index – Spirit Unbounded](#) provides an index to all the speakers and their talks

1.4 Course Structure



Week 1 – Introduction to Root & Branch and Spirit Unbounded (Companion Overview)

Week 2 – Caring for our home (Laudato Si')

Week 3 - Exclusion: Unequal Equality

Week 4 – Exclusion: Use & Abuse of Power

Week 5 – Inclusion: Global Heroes

Week 6 – Inclusion: Bearing Witness to Truthfulness

Week 7 – Plenary – Wrap Up session

Week 8 and beyond: Accountability Session – one month, one year? (Group Decides)

1.5 Week 1 Overview

- Introduction to the course
- Course outline
- Setting group boundaries
- Thinking about learning hopes and outcomes
- Learning about SU Companions

1.6 Respect from and to everyone



We hope that this material helps you to reflect on some important issues facing the Catholic Church today. The Church is not yet a safe place for most victim-survivors of Church-related abuse and many people are excluded from full participation in the Sacramental life of the Church. Some of the issues that are discussed may feel difficult for some of us to listen to.

We hope that you will feel free to share, explore, and clarify as well as disagree with each other. In doing this we ask that you commit to showing 'respect from and to everyone' who is listening to the material with you. Consider whether you might want to make agreements with each other, for example, *'What's said in this room stays in the room'* or *'We will make space for everyone who wants to speak'* or *'We'll listen attentively to each other'*.

We hope that agreeing some simple ground rules during week 1 will make it safer for you to share your thoughts and questions.

Let's also bear in mind that if we're sharing information that isn't in the public domain, please do think twice and be careful not to name others.



1.7 Week One – Group Discussion

What are you hoping to gain from this 8-week course?

Jot down your thoughts privately and share those you feel comfortable to share amongst the group

Set group boundaries for safety and respect

Learning Hopes

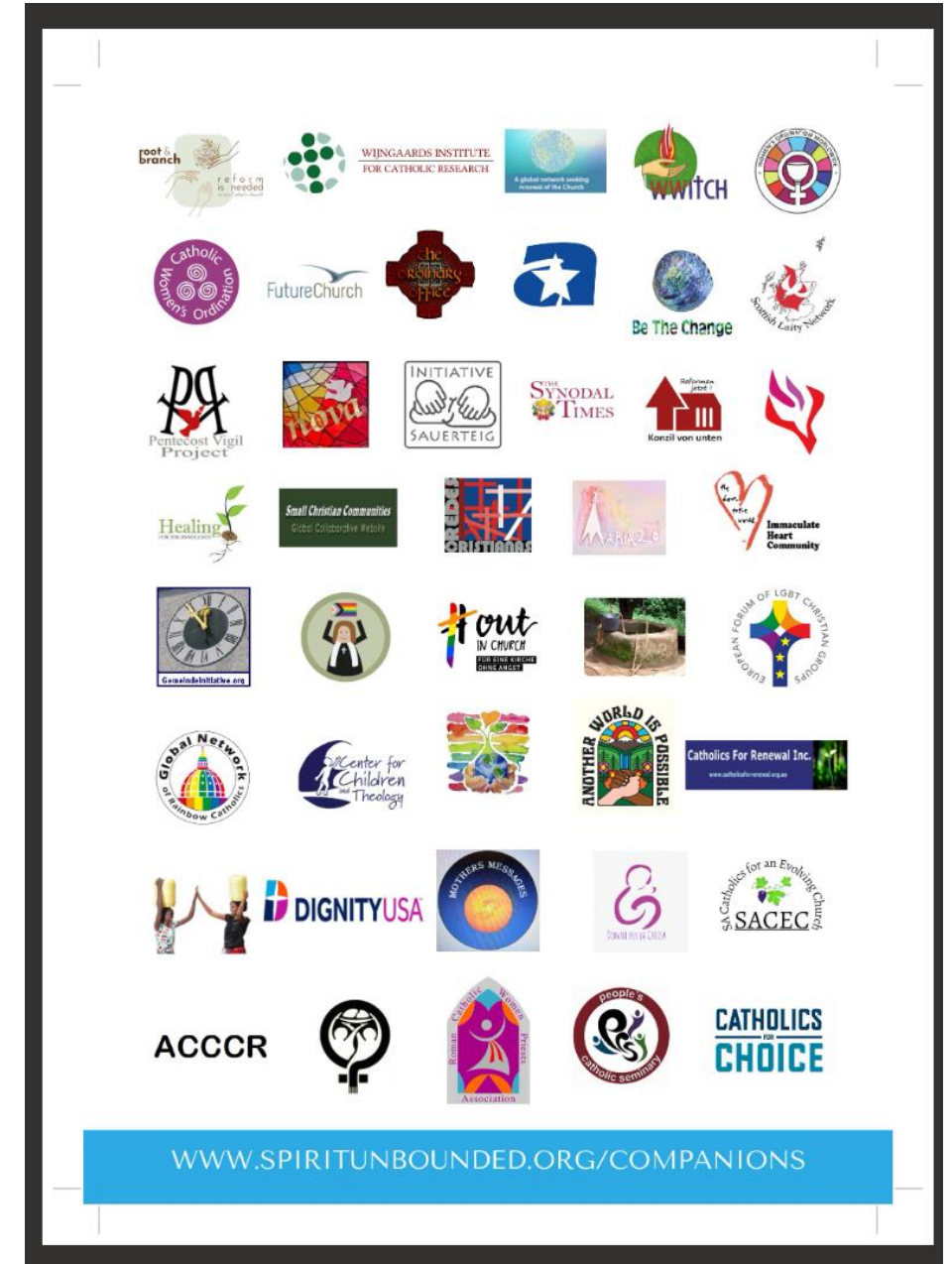
Group Boundaries

1.8 Learning Resources

Who are Root & Branch?

A short video from Mary Ring one of the core members of Root and Branch providing a short history to Root & Branch, Spirit Unbounded and the work of reform organisation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x-1pRjKq9k>



1.9 Personal Action Plan



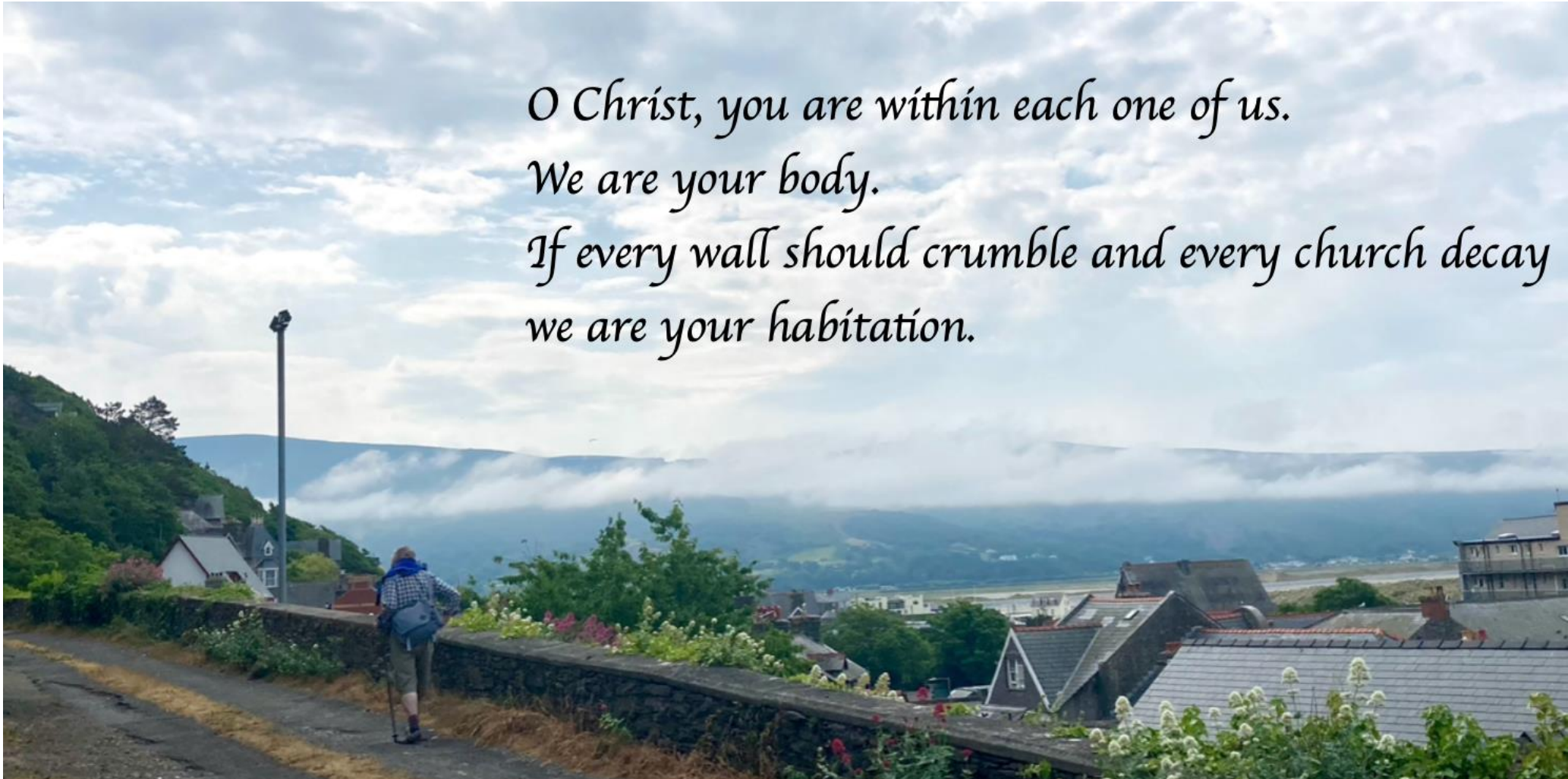
List some steps that you will take during the next week to support your learning.

I will watch the Week 2 videos on the course page
I will research two new companion websites
I will subscribe to a newsletter
I might follow some on social media
I will reflect on why I am a Catholic

1.10 Prayer to Close



*O Christ, you are within each one of us.
We are your body.
If every wall should crumble and every church decay
we are your habitation.*



Resources for Support and Information

Replenished Life – supporting ‘those who have experienced abuse and trauma within faith’ (UK)

Website: <https://www.replenished.life/>
Helpline Monday & Tuesday 9-5, 07746 153703

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2





2.1 Just a moment

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2.2 Week 2 Outline

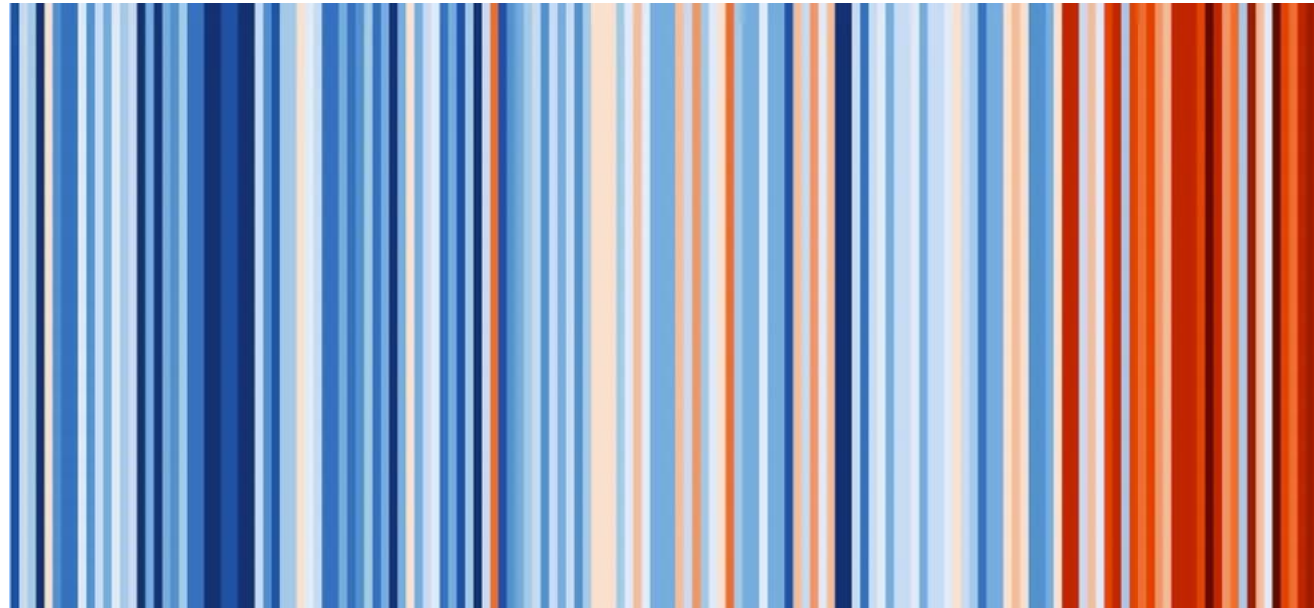
- Review last week notes and any reflections
- Introduction to climate change – Laudate Si
- Group thoughts about how climate change and faith are related
- Moving onto exclusion by the Church

2.3 Introduction & Reflection



- Did anyone do some research on the companion organisations?
- Did you feel empowered knowing more information and support was available?
- Were you aware of the breadth of reform organisations?
- Are there any you feel you closely aligned too?
- How might you get involved with those groups that interest you?
- How did you come to Catholicism? What keeps you here?

2.4 How can we care for our planet and our people?



[Climate change: Stripes campaign 'started conversations' - BBC News](#)

2.5 Laudato Si'



Group Discussion

Are you aware of Laudato Si'?

www.laudatosi.org/laudato-si/action-platform/

Or the CAFOD Live Simply programme?

https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/livesimply-award

In what way do you currently protect your local, national or global environment?

[Christian Climate Action – Direct action, public witness for the climate](#)

2.6 Learning resources



Week 2

When the land is well, the people will be well

In this video we hear about the need to prioritize environmental health over economic gains, suggesting that solutions to current issues lie in traditional knowledge and a shift in priorities. Duration - 12 minutes.

When the River is Well We are Well

Sr Makareta Tawaroa discusses the deep connection between the Māori people and the Whanganui River. Duration - 10 minutes.

Fighting for Climate Safety

Marie Venner emphasizes the urgent need for climate action, highlighting the severe impacts of extreme heat and pollution on vulnerable populations. Duration 25 minutes.

Root & Branch Talks: Laudato Si'

The video features Kathleen McLaughlin, who underscores the role of businesses in serving society and the planet, advocating for a regenerative approach that goes beyond sustainability to actively restore and renew ecosystems. The talk connects these efforts to the principles outlined in Pope Francis's encyclical, Laudato Si', calling for holistic solutions and collaboration across sectors. Duration - 1 hour 15 minutes.

What is Regeneration?

The overarching theme of this beautiful video is that regeneration is essential for a harmonious and resilient world. Duration - 6 minutes.

Head to Root & Branch Synod website to pick up your course videos or the Speaker Index on Spirit Unbounded.

<https://spiritunbounded.org/speaker-index>

2.7 Personal Action Plan



- List some long-term actions and hopes you have from this course, share those with your group and consider how to make each other accountable

Watch week 3 videos on course pages

Donate to companion organisations link to Root & Branch

Find out more about carbon emissions and your impact on the planet

[LiveSimply award \(cafod.org.uk\)](https://www.cafod.org.uk)

[WWF Footprint Calculator](#)

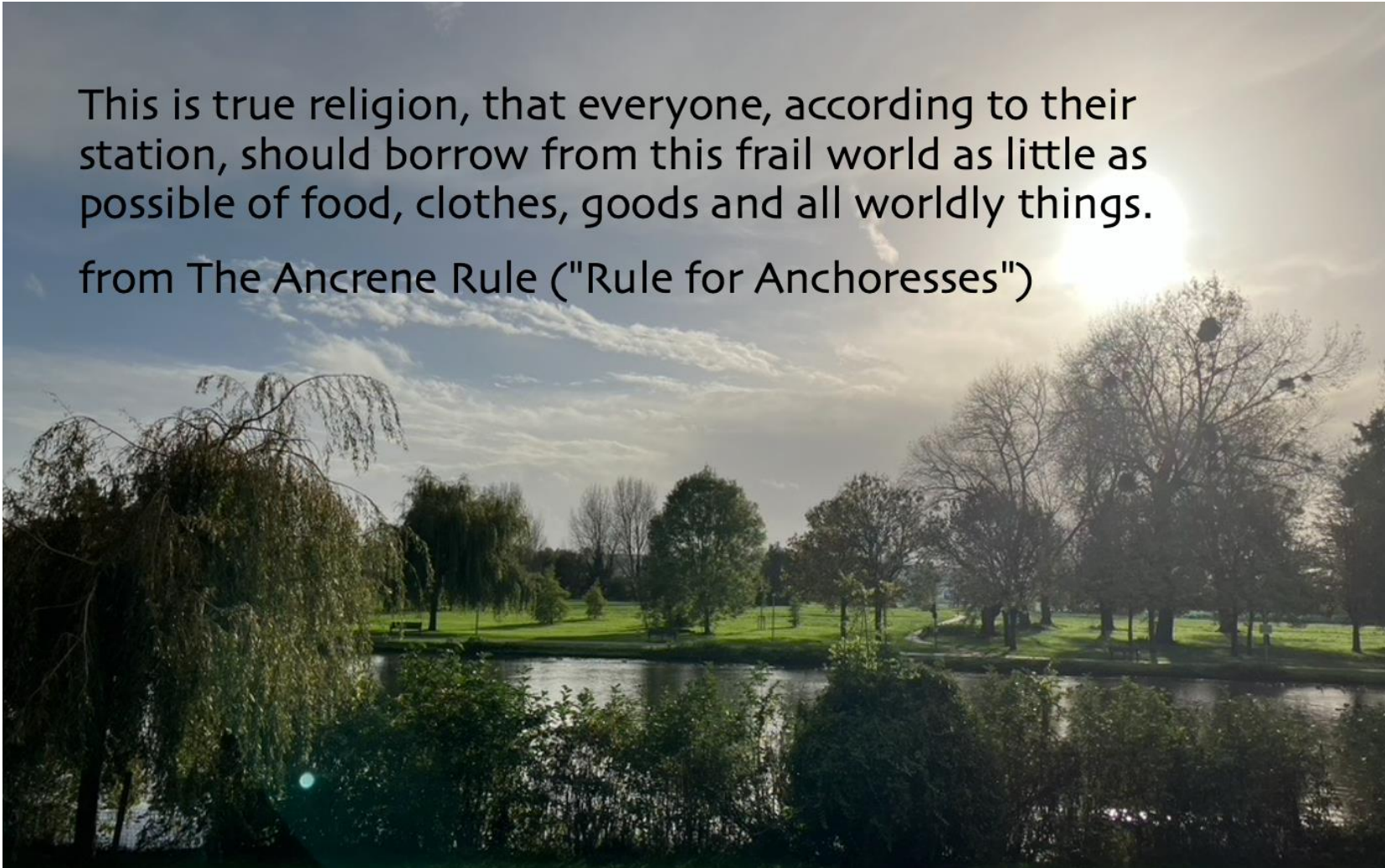
[Christian Climate Action – Direct action, public witness for the climate](#)

[Impact | Community carbon calculator \(impact-tool.org.uk\)](https://www.impact-tool.org.uk)

2.8 Thought to Close



This is true religion, that everyone, according to their station, should borrow from this frail world as little as possible of food, clothes, goods and all worldly things.
from The Ancrene Rule ("Rule for anchoresses")



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3





3.1 Just a moment

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3.2 Week 3 Overview



- Review on previous week learning and action plans
- Group discussion and reflections:
 - How is your faith linked to caring for the planet?
 - How can we move from taking to giving?
- Moving onto learning about those excluded from the Church

3.3 Introduction & Reflection



- Reflect back on your personal action plan and note down any actions you were able to take.
- Check in with each other following the learnings from last week and any thoughts or feelings that arose following the videos.

3.4 Learning resources



Week 3

Racism in the Catholic Church

Nate Tinner-Williams, a Catholic journalist, critiques the Catholic Church for its inadequate response to racism, particularly within the United States. Tinner-Williams calls for genuine dialogue and action within the Church to confront and resolve these issues, urging Black Catholics and allies to persist in their advocacy for true reform. Duration - 9 minutes.

Synodality: Grassroots to the Vatican

Kate McElwee, the executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, advocates for women's ordination and gender equity within the Roman Catholic Church. McElwee emphasizes the need for the Church to recognize and affirm women's leadership sacramentally. Duration - 17 minutes.

Sexual Justice in the Catholic Church

Irish priest Bernard Lynch, who is openly gay, played a significant role in ministering to the HIV/AIDS community in New York during the height of the crisis. He envisions a future where all religions champion love and dignity for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or beliefs. Duration - 15 minutes.

Voice, Love and Freedom

Katherine Zappone emphasizes the need for self-love, collective voice, and empathy to drive transformational change and human rights within the Church, advocating for a global strategy to harness progressive religious interpretations and ensure bodily autonomy and moral agency for all. Duration - 18 minutes.

Head to Root & Branch Synod website to pick up your course videos or the Speaker Index on Spirit Unbounded.

[Speaker Index – Spirit Unbounded](#)

3.5 Exclusion: Unequal Equality



Group Discussion: Can you define the following terms?

- Inequality
- Equality
- Equity
- Justice

Inequality

Unequal access to opportunities



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Equity

Custom tools that identify and address inequality



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Equality?

Evenly distributed tools and assistance



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Justice

Fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities



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3.6 Exclusion



Group Discussion:

Can you think of people who feel excluded from the church?

Are there times you have felt this way? Can you think of reasons why they or you have been excluded?

Add some notes here from your discussion

3.7 Personal Action Plan



List some steps that you will take during the next week to support your learning

Watch week 4 video content

Could you listen to people you know who may have left the Church and explore why with them?

Consider talking about the impact this has had on them?

3.8 Prayer to Close



Increase our hope, dispel our apathy, inspire our imagination and deepen our commitment, until we become the signs of your kingdom for which we and others pray.

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4.1 Just a moment

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4.2 Overview

- Making time to check in with each other
- Reviewing our thoughts about exclusion and who this impacts
- Reflecting on our personal action plan
- Looking at the ways in which the church excludes and how the systems enable this exclusion
- Considering our personal values and how they might support us create a more inclusive church

4.3 Use and Abuse of Power



HIDDEN FOR CENTURIES

- Miriam Duignan: Where did the women go?
- Aly Kateusz: Hidden for Centuries (también en español)
- Oíga Consuelo Vélaz Camp: Women in the Church (también en español original)
- Cathy Corbitt: Jesus's teaching of equality
- Nameeta Renu: Jesus Christ is Risen and Alive
- Pat Brown: A letter to the Bishops in England and Wales
- Music: Jubilee (Porter's Gate Worship Group)

THE UPSIDE-DOWN PYRAMID

- Thomas O'Loughlin: Equality, Dignity and Neighbourliness
- Tina Beattie: Catholic Women and the Sensus Fidei
- Luca Badini Confalonieri: A Constitution Proposed for the Catholic Church
- James Carroll: Last Chance Church. A personal statement
- Paul Hwang: We Must Make Change in the Church Possible!
- Maggie Carway: Faithfully Represented?
- Music: We Labour Unto Glory (Porter's Gate Worship Project)

THE CHURCH OF NOW

- Raynah Ilaganza Pessanha: Being Church in a culture of Submission or Liberation
- Kevin Liston: Clericalism Lifestyles and Cultures
- Mary Ellen Chown: Indulgences
- Benedicta Stella Fortunae: Youths are the Church of Now
- Joe Kuffy: World Youth Day, Lisbon
- Bhannon Parry Thompson: The Triumph of Hope. The story of a second marriage
- Music: Let Us Be Known (Porter's Gate Worship Project)

My name is Tom Doyle, and I was asked to

WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Women in the priesthood and the mind of Christ

John Wijngaards, DD, LSS
- Introduction by Trent Angers, OFS -

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Discipleship of Equals

ekklesia-logy
A Critical Feminist Ecclesiology of Liberation

4.4 Learning resources



Week 4

Where did women go?

Miriam Duignan argues that the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood is not rooted in the teachings of Jesus or early Church tradition but rather in patriarchal and misogynistic interpretations that developed later. Duration - 15 minutes.

Patriarchy: Where Did It All Begin?

Angela Saini's talk explores the origins and persistence of patriarchy, questioning why men have historically held power over women. Duration - 40 minutes.

The Wound that will not Heal

Tom Doyle, a former Catholic priest, discusses the systemic issues within the Catholic Church that have allowed clerical sexual abuse to persist for centuries. Duration - 20 minutes.

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4.5 Exclusion: Use & Abuse of Power



Reflections

Did you think about exclusion in its many forms?

Can you describe some of the feelings this evoked from you?

Let's think about values and how they might impact our beliefs around exclusion and provide insights as to how we might tackle exclusion when we witness it.

4.6 Values



Think about your personal values and how they are impacted by the knowledge that some feel excluded from the church?

4.7 Healthy Curiosity



A willingness to respect a rule when we encounter it, but also a healthy curiosity as to its continuing purpose and an examination of its greater aim.

What do you see in the pictures below? Is this THE truth?

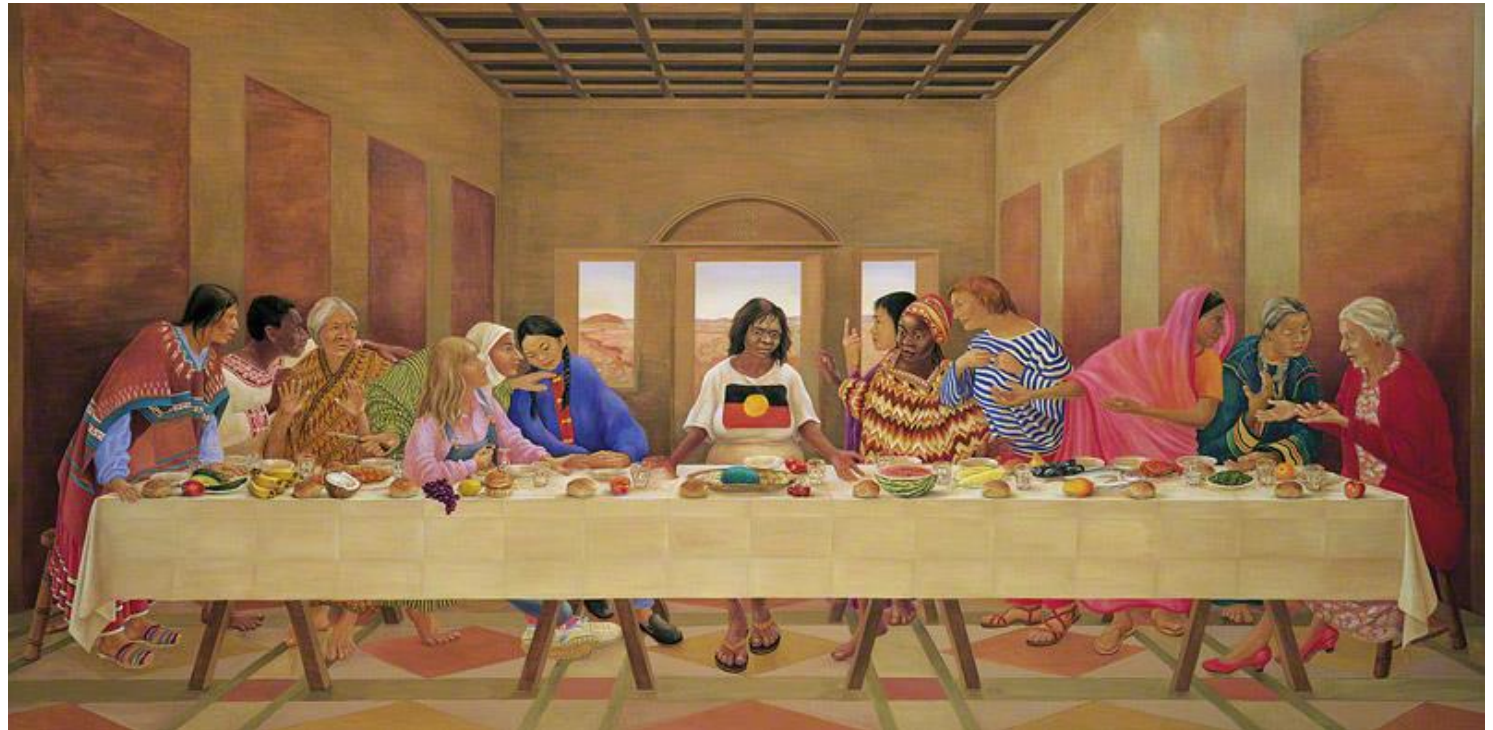


4.8 Healthy Curiosity



- In what way does the Church's teachings support or hinder exclusion?
- How might you fact check the Church or find out if what you are hearing is truth?

Susan Dorothea White depicted 13 different women from all parts of the world. Read her rationale [here](#).



4.9 Personal Action Plan



List some steps that you will take during the next week to support your learning

Watch next weeks videos from the course pages

Are there ways you can use your values to help you fight for inclusion?

Can you find other examples of fact checking to share?

4.10 Thought to Close



“You have been told,
O mortal, what is
good and what YHWH
requires of you:
to do justice, to love
mercy, and to walk
humbly with your
God.”

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5





5.1 Just a moment

O Great Spirit, help me always to speak the truth quietly, listen with an open mind when others speak, and remember the peace that may be found in silence.

5.2 Overview



- Reflection on personal action plans
- Moving on to look at some Global Heroes who are creating an inclusive Catholic Church
- Beginning to think about steps we can take in our own lives to support the emerging church

5.3 Inclusion



- Reflect on your learning plans over the weeks – which tasks have been easy to complete?
- We are just over halfway – check in with yourself and each other ?
- Did you find any other examples of people in your local circles speaking out against injustice?
- Can you think of anything they had in common? Did you see their values in action?

5.4 Inclusion



Rev Shanon Sterringer has been a member of the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests (ARCWP) since 2019. She is an avid scholar with multiple degrees culminating in a PhD in Ethical and Creative Leadership focussed on the leadership example of Saint Hildegard of Bingen. Her CV has included work as a certified lay ecclesial minister and master catechist in the Diocese of Cleveland, supporting missionary work in India, and giving seminars in India and the Holy Land on women and ecclesial leadership. She is author of 30 day Journey with St Hildegard of Bingen and her new book, *Forbidden Grace*, about her call to ministry is about to be published. Latterly, she has founded and is Director of [Hildegard Haus](#) and the developing Community of St Hildegard in Fairport Harbor, Ohio. She is a mother of three. The Church excommunicated her *latae sententiae* (automatically) when she was ordained.

5.5 Inclusion



Group Discussion

- Think about a time you had to be truthful in the face of challenging or difficult circumstances.
- If you feel able, please share this experience think about how you found courage to express truth, the impact of the experience on you and those around you.

5.6 Learning Resources



Week 5

Shaking the Tree: Unbinding Our Stories

The talk by Brian Devlin discusses the pervasive issue of clerical power abuse within seminaries, where priests are trained. Devlin shares his personal experience at a Scottish seminary, highlighting the emotional and sexual abuse he endured from a spiritual director, Father Keith O'Brien. Duration - 20 minutes.

Advocate for Justice with Catholic Teaching

Jamie Manson, president of Catholics for Choice, discusses how Catholic teachings on conscience, religious freedom, and social justice can be used to advocate for issues like abortion rights, same-sex marriage, contraception, and trans rights. Manson argues that these teachings can be powerful tools in challenging the Church's stance on various social issues. Duration - 15 minutes

Head to Root & Branch Synod website to pick up your course videos or the Speaker Index on Spirit Unbounded.

<https://spiritunbounded.org/speaker-index>

5.7 Personal Action Plan

List some steps that you will take during the next week to support your learning



See if you can find other local examples of people speaking truth to power or speaking out against injustice.

5.8 Thought to Close



Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

- I shall not fear anyone on Earth.
 - I shall fear only God.
 - I shall not bear ill will toward anyone.
 - I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.
 - I shall conquer untruth by truth. And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering.
- Mahatma Gandhi

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6





6.1 Just a moment

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6.2 Overview

Check in with the group

Seek feedback on personal action plans

Stories from those trying to affect change in the
Church

6.3 Learning Resources



Week 6

Last Chance Church: A Personal Statement

James Carroll, a writer from Boston, Massachusetts, shares his vision for the future of the Catholic Church. He advocates for a church governed by laypeople, with women fully equal to men, and free from clericalism. Duration - 5 minutes.

Centering Catholic Ethics

Hille Hakker suggests a shift towards embracing human rights and narrative ethics, focusing on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as central to Christian moral theology. Duration - 19 minutes.

The Church that judges God's children?

Benedikt Klafki, an 18-year-old from Germany currently living in Norway, is advocating for changes in the Catholic Church, particularly in its approach to human rights, equality, and inclusion. Duration - 4 minutes.

Towards Non-Imperial Discipleship

Diarmuid O'Murchu's presentation, "Reworking the Tradition: Towards Non-Imperial Discipleship," explores the need for the Christian church to evolve beyond traditional hierarchical structures. Duration - 50 minutes.

Head to Root & Branch Synod website to pick up your course videos or the Speaker Index on Spirit Unbounded.

<https://spiritunbounded.org/speaker-index>

6.4 Group Reflections



- What are we afraid of when we think about the future of the Church?
- Why is it important for you to remain a catholic? What about Catholicism do you value?
- How does fear impact our behaviour?
- What conditions might need to exist for you to feel safe to do the same?
- What outcomes are you afraid of in considering speaking up?
- How might your values support you to challenge injustice?

6.5 Personal Action Plan

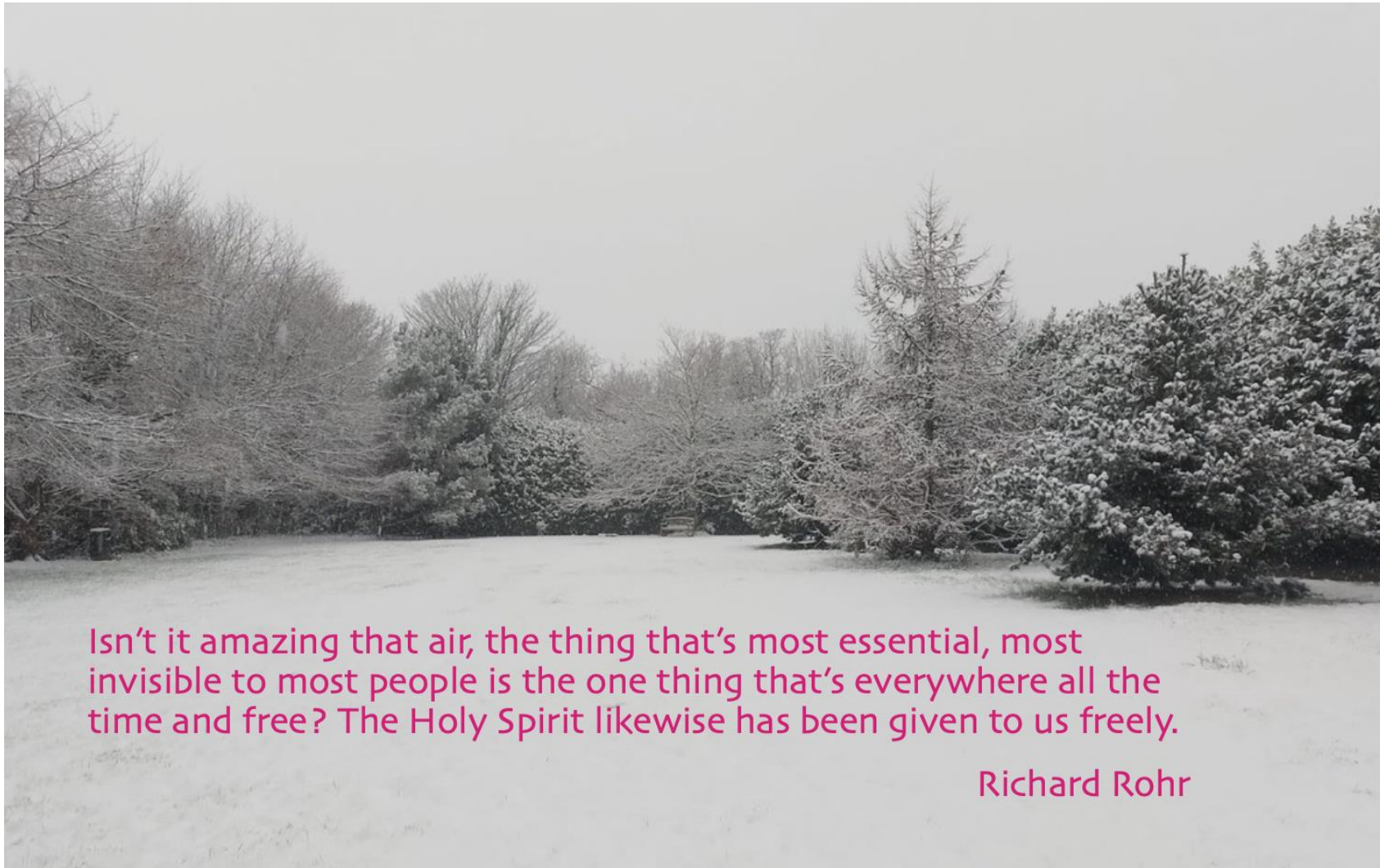
List some steps that you will take during the next week to support your learning



Research one of your spiritual heroes and think about how they overcame challenges. Can you translate any of this to your own life?

Think about your own personal values and how they might support you in challenging in justice.

6.6 Thought to Close



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7





7.1 Just a moment

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7.2 Overview

- Bringing the course to a close
- Refining our own personal actions and next steps
- Reflecting on all we have learned
- Agreeing some accountability with our group

7.3 Wrap Up

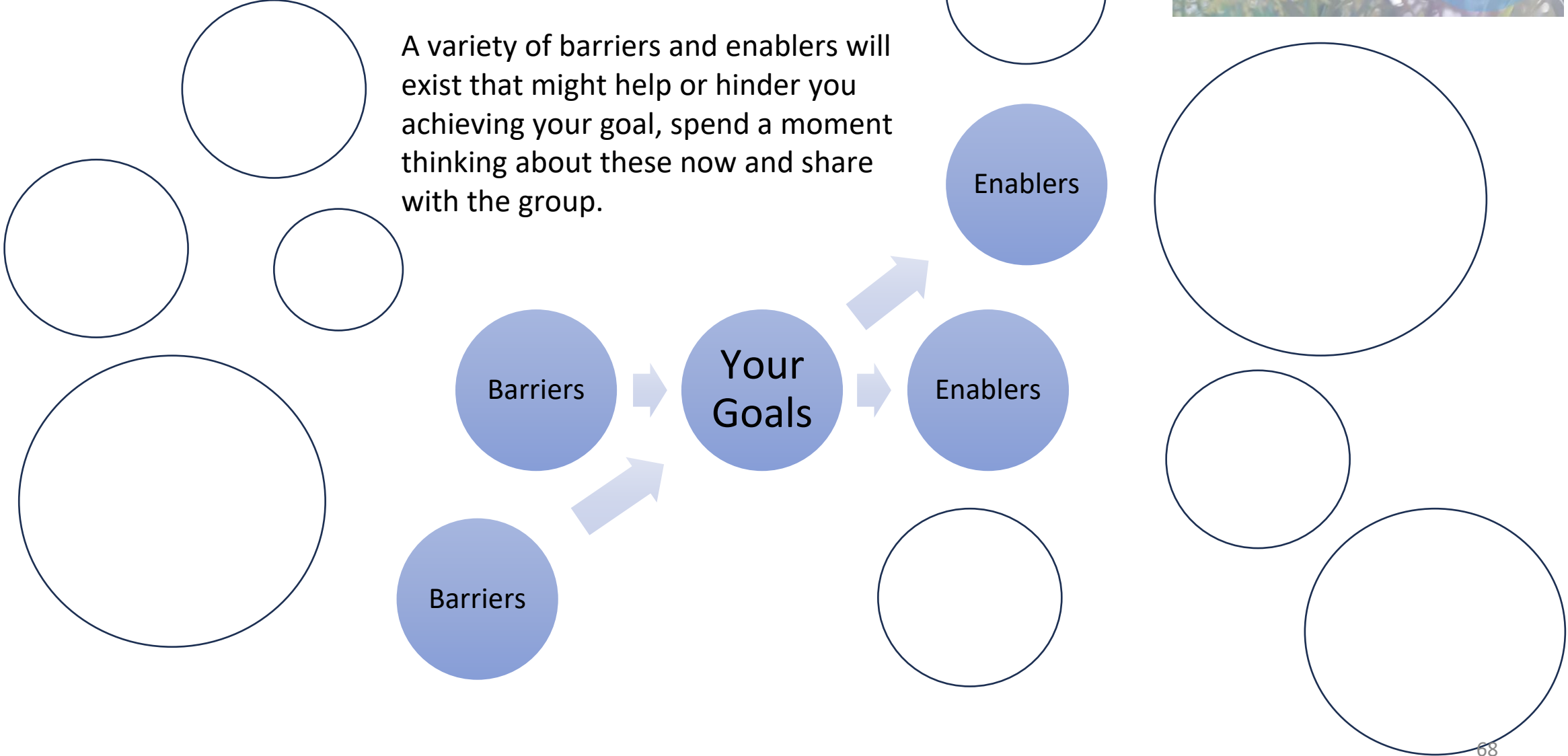


- Has anything you have discovered troubled you?
- Look back to your week one entries about what you hoped to learn during this course and reflect on your successes throughout.
- Note some highlights from the course or conversations and share these with your group.
- Did you have a favourite speaker or video?



7.5 Barriers and enablers

A variety of barriers and enablers will exist that might help or hinder you achieving your goal, spend a moment thinking about these now and share with the group.



7.6 Thought to close



A Friendship Blessing

May you be blessed with good friends.

May you learn to be a good friend to yourself.

May you be able to journey to that place in your soul where there is great love, warmth, feeling, and forgiveness.

May this change you.

May it transfigure that which is negative, distant, or cold in you.

May you be brought in to the real passion, kinship, and affinity of belonging.

May you treasure your friends.

May you be good to them and may you be there for them; may they bring you all the blessing, challenges, truth, and light that you need for your journey.

May you never be isolated.

May you always be in the gentle nest of belonging with your anam cara.

John O'Donoghue

Anam

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8





8.2 Just a moment

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8.3 Overview

- What long term reflections have you had from the course?
- Have you managed to do your One Thing?
- Is there any ongoing learning or sharing you might like to do as a group?

8.4 Accountability

- Check back to the One Thing you noted at the end of week 7
- Have you managed to achieve this at all?
- If not explore with the group why not?
- Where might you take your learning next? Stolen lives for example?
- Please take a moment to complete the course evaluation form below to help us refine and update this course for future groups.

[Course Evaluation - Google Forms](#)

8.5 Prayer to Close

- My God be
a bright flame before you,
a guiding star above you,
a smooth path below you
a kindly shepherd behind you
in the days and nights to come.



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Safe Spaces – Church of England/Catholic survivors (UK)

Website: <https://safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/>
Helpline 7 days per week 0300 3031056, live chat, advocacy & online resources

MACSAS- Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (UK)

Website: <https://www.macsas.org.uk/>
Helpline: 08088 01 03 40.

Survivor Voices – pain into power (UK)

Website: <https://survivorsvoices.org/>

SNAP – Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests -international

Website: <https://www.snapnetwork.org/>

