

# Sharing the Peace

## **Safeguarding and pastoral issues to be aware of**

For very many people, sharing the Peace within the Eucharist, or at a Service of the Word, is a very powerful time for reaffirming the value, support and love that comes from being part of a Christian community. Certainly sharing the Peace has added enormously to emotional value of acts of worship.

However whilst sharing the Peace, whether it be through a handshake, a hug or a kiss, gives added Christian security to most, it can reduce the personal security of others, who may feel pressure to join in when they would rather not.

People in this category may include:

- Those new to the Church
- Those who are naturally reticent in nature
- Victims or survivors of abuse (including sexual harassment), which mean they need to feel in control of any physical contact
- Those who are young and vulnerable adults

In addition, it may be that the Peace is used by some as a way to overcome disagreement, without having to tackle the issue that caused the disagreement. This is clearly acceptable when both parties to the disagreement are comfortable with this approach but it is not uncommon for the injured party to feel forced into bonhomie and Christian forgiveness before they are ready.

Clearly, everyone is entitled to feel secure and in control of their own personal space in church and no one should be encouraged to share the Peace in whatever way if this is likely to violate that or cause them to feel uncomfortable. It is possible that the Peace might be used to engage in or initiate inappropriate contact and certainly possible that an innocent offer to share the Peace might be misconstrued in this way. Perhaps a general rule for sharing the Peace with someone you have not shared it with before might be:

**Make sure you have eye contact, and therefore implied permission, to share the Peace with someone you have not shared it with before, and restrict this sharing to a handshake for the first occasion, and subsequently, until you are confident that anything else will be welcome.**

Care also needs to be taken that the Peace does not become exclusive. This can happen when an 'in group' begins unnecessary conversations or laughter. Often others can be left on the outskirts feeling left out.

**It is not really appropriate to have guidelines in service books or pew leaflets warning people of these points. However it is perhaps important that there would be several people in a congregation charged with a role of keeping a watching brief to have an overview on what the Peace looks like as a whole.**

**These might include:**

- **Ministers, readers and Lay leaders of Worship**
- **Those employed in a pastoral role (either paid or voluntary) by the Church**
- **Parish Safeguarding Officers**
- **Church wardens**
- **Those with responsibility for children, young people or newcomers within the Church**

If any of this group notice a situation in the Peace where they sense someone is uncomfortable, they should alert the minister or, if appropriate, the Parish Safeguarding Officer. It then will be possible to have a quiet word with those affected or in extreme cases to take other action.

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