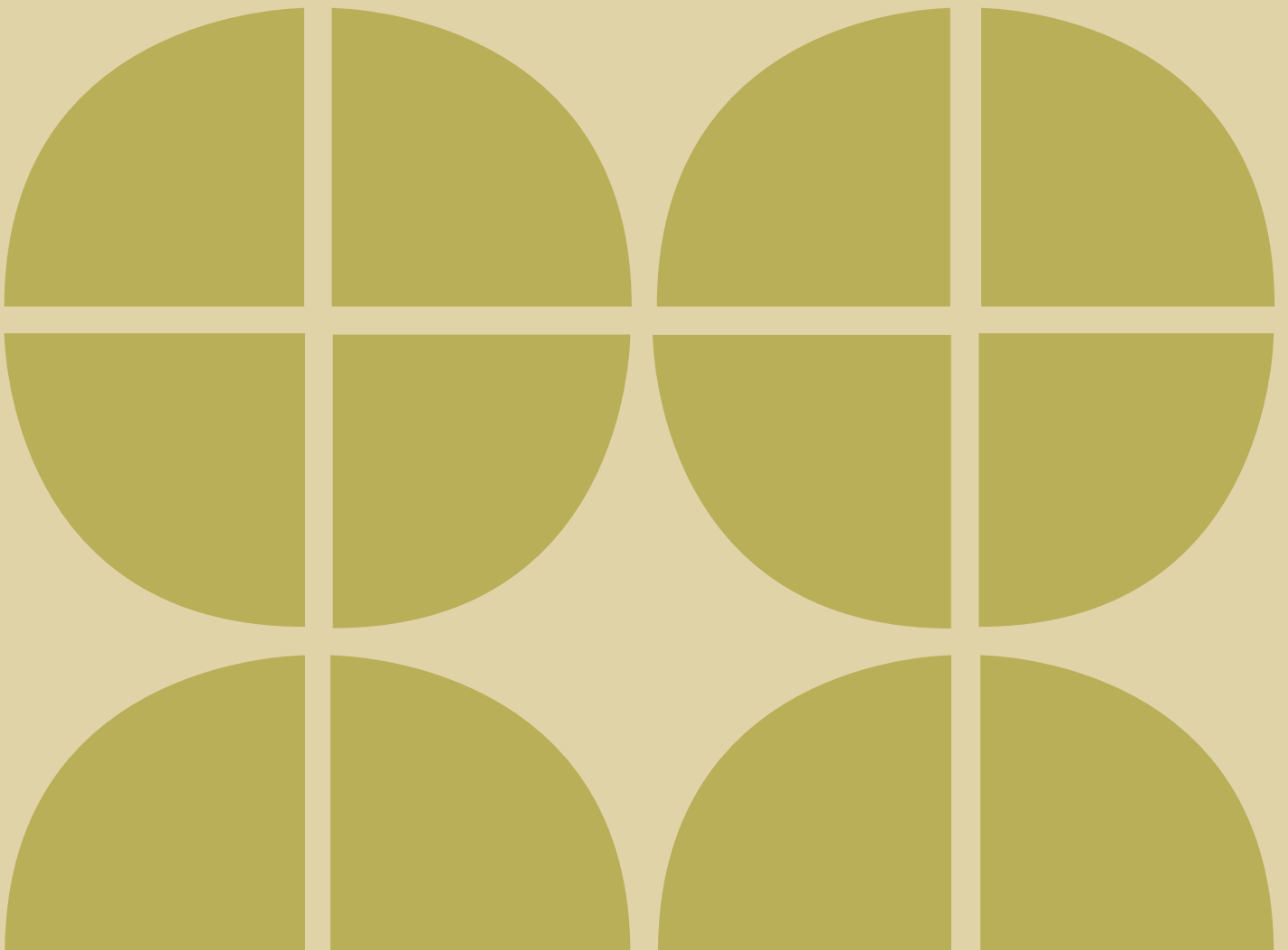




Chapter Nine

Afterword: What happens next?



We close this report with some deep convictions and invitations.

The first is gratitude. We are deeply grateful to all those who participated in this research, particularly those to whom abuse has caused great harm. It is an act of courage and solidarity to take part in research on such a sensitive matter. In each person who spoke to us, we heard integrity and witnessed soul-searching. It has been a privilege to listen to them and to draw out the fragments of truth and insight which are the gift of the Spirit.

The second is a conviction that the response of the Catholic Church in England and Wales to the victims and survivors of abuse is not yet adequate or complete. Although safeguarding practice is well established and independent auditing is underway to ensure high standards are met, there has been no visible communal process at a significant level of listening and learning from those who have carried the worst of the harm done. As explored in the last chapter, our proposal is that restorative approaches could offer the most valuable way to explore what repair is possible and what kinds of justice could be done. This is an opportunity for showing the kind of leadership for which people hunger and thirst.

This conviction leads to an invitation. We hope that people will learn from this report what the abuse crisis has been like for so many people within and sometimes now outside the Church; those directly wounded and those who hold leadership roles, as well as many others among the baptised. To some, particularly office holders, the narrative of the early chapters here may offer little that seems new, as they have been coping with abuse and its aftermath for some time. But this broad portrait is not available to the majority of church members, which in turn impedes the whole Church from understanding and engaging in a compassionate response.

We hope that reading the report will provoke questions, reflection and prayer. This report follows a certain path, from people's experience, to the habits and attitudes in Catholic culture that are implicated, and then to the ideas in Catholic teaching and theology which need to be rethought. We would not claim that these are the only lines of interpretation. Rather, we invite more thought, more reflection and above all, discernment. Where does this report take your own conscience, faith and prayer? How do you hear the Spirit calling us forward in the light of all the voices that speak in this text?

We need to continue conversations of this kind. We invite reading together: at parish level, perhaps in groups convened by safeguarding representatives; by priests and deacons, in whatever settings support supportive and transparent reflection, and whenever possible, in conversations which involve laypeople and religious; and by office-holders, also in settings which include others.

Some capacity for action in response is possible for all of us. We can all choose in small steps to grow out of clericalism; to resist and break silences; to take responsibility. We can all bring these concerns and the people whom they have affected into our prayer, and we can support the initiatives which make visible both the pain and failure which needs recognition and the desires and possibilities of all that helps and heals.

