

# **A POTTED HISTORY OF TAMAR AND THE DIOCESE OF SYDNEY IN RELATON TO SEXUAL ABUSE**

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Thank you for inviting me to speak your 2021 AGM. Years ago I was a member of MOW, but later, with the emergence of TAMAR, it overtook my life.

In 2017 I was awarded a doctorate by the Australian Catholic University for my thesis on *A History of TAMAR (1996-2008) Towards A More Appropriate Response*. My supervisor was a lovely Mercy Sister, Dr. Sophie McGrath. She died last year (2020) and I miss her greatly. She guided me carefully and lovingly for six years to achieve my PhD. I gave it to Archbishop Glenn Davies, as a gift to the Diocese. He suggested that he could give it to Moore College, after he had read it. I agreed. It was the best place for it. Men everywhere! Some women! I also gifted it to Mary Andrews College.

1995 was a moment in time that ushered in a profound sense of spiritual renewal and discovery. Similar to other women who stayed, somewhat tenuously, in the Anglican Church with its patriarchal and hierarchical structures, I knew that little had changed within those structures, in particular that feminine roles in the church tended to be still far more represented in the service sector, such as playgroups, music, catering committees, 'spring cleaning' and flower rosters.

This essay is structured around two leitmotifs: the genesis of TAMAR's history, together with some its hard-won achievements, and the Diocese of Sydney in the context of time and place, together with events surrounding its people.

It was also a time for both TAMAR and the Church to begin the journey of 'building a boat while you sail'. This image captured their diametrically opposite 'waves' of understanding in relation to sexual abuse by clergy and church workers.

The TAMAR women, without power, money or image, were at the opposite end of the spectrum to the Diocese of Sydney, with its patriarchal institutional power, money and historical image.

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT**

This essay begins by looking at the Anglican Church of Australia as "The Establishment".

Associate Professor of Mission Theology and Social Anthropologist Fr Anthony Gittins' statement below, written ten years prior to the formation of TAMAR in 1966, succinctly and accurately describes virtually all the elements of TAMAR's ethos, structures and work. In his article, 'Ecology and World Powers: A Christian response', Gittins refers to "brave and prophetic individuals" concerned with gospel values—such were the women of TAMAR. He writes:

The Establishment does not initiate fundamental change, so we cannot appeal to all clergy or religious in this matter. No, the response has to come from brave and prophetic individuals. This does not, of course, exclude clergy and religious, but the world cannot wait for them to reach a consensus. Individuals are needed as catalysts for change at a society-wide level, concerned about the gospel values and not about what others do or think. People will have to be prepared to go it alone or to work in very small groups; certainly, they will need to be an embarrassment and a nuisance. And perhaps those newly forming Christian communities, springing up like flowers after winter, are best placed to provide the variety and the growth and the environment for a response to new challenges; they have the flexibility and the youthfulness and the idealism to be spontaneous and generous. They are explicitly concerned about a more human Church, and perhaps will make an authentic contribution toward a suffering humanity and nature.

Women throughout history have contributed much for the good of the whole. TAMAR and MOW are such examples in relation to the Anglican Church of Australia, particularly in relation to the Diocese of Sydney.

### **1995 TAMAR EARLY BEGINNINGS**

TAMAR's history begins with two singular and significant events which occurred in 1995 in relation to its establishment. First, Sue Foley wrote to Gwentyth Higginbotham and second, I met Sue Foley.

Correspondence from Sue Foley to Gwentyth Higginbotham on 7 June 1995 was in relation to convening a Focus Group for Women in the Anglican Church Helping Services. Foley writes:

As part of my research, following on from my questionnaires, I would like to facilitate a series of focus groups to look at the way women are inhibited or encouraged to see things differently in their helping role within the Anglican Church.

She suggests that this Focus Group would meet several times.

Earlier in the year, Sue Foley's article, 'Lean on me', was published in the 1995 *Southern Cross* Winter Edition. She was a member on the Sydney Diocesan Sub-committee, mentioned below. Sue, who at the time was Manager, Care Force Child & Family Services, NSW, asks "When will the problem of sexual abuse be taken seriously?" She then answers her own question:

It is the mid-1990s and this diocese has not yet taken the issue seriously. Protocols on management of abuse by clergy or church workers were recommended a year ago by a majority of a subcommittee established by the Standing Committee. They have not yet been acted on. Recently the Standing Committee knocked back an opportunity to support a preventative program for the diocese, in relation to the Anglican Counselling Centre.

Foley's 'Lean on me' article further delineates Gittins' The Establishment's ethos. She writes:

...in the history of the processes for the Diocese in coming to terms with the need for a protocol, it is clear that the structure of the Diocese with the same people on heaps of committees, poor representation of women and a very hierarchical and non-consultative model has meant that this process is hampered by these structures.... I understand that no women – including the Diocesan Archdeacon for Women have been involved in the process.

I responded to Sue's Foley's article, and we met. We discussed the issues of sexual abuse by clergy and church workers in relation to the Diocese of Sydney.

The outcome was a meeting of like-minds and experiences. We both had suffered sexual abuse by incest. Actually, I had a bit of a list, as I am a sexual abuse victim/survivor. In the 1940s, as a child, I was molested by an uncle who was revered by my family. Second, an attempted rape by another older relative. I was 17, on a Tasmanian holiday. He told my aunties he would drive me to Devonport's headland to view the evening lights of the town. He attempted to rape me. I fought like a tiger, and ran to the cliff edge, threatening to jump. Third, I was targeted for sexual misconduct by a former West Ryde rector, now deceased. The power and the age imbalance between the perpetrator and victim can be significant. I should add, decades later, I found out that the uncle had molested all my three siblings.

Sue Foley asked for help from *her* Rector, who said, "Go away, things like that didn't happen in families like mine" (a Church family).

On the other hand, I didn't ask for help over my three encounters because of the emphasis from the pulpit, being "The Sin Problem." All this dreadful horror was my fault!

Sue Foley addresses the sin problem in 'Lean on me'. She writes:

The dilemma of sin...can be too difficult if it threatens to show up problems at leadership level....  
The scriptures upon which the Church relies, talk about freedom, truth, repentance, grace and healing—why are these not the building blocks of any Church policy?

Our shared stories became the foundational building blocks of our deep friendship and it was in that context that Sue mentioned forming a Focus Group.

Initially twelve women met. One subject discussed was the relevance of its name. *The Focus Group for Women in the Anglican Church Helping Services* was too long. This was particularly relevant as we knew our mission was to be educators to a church moribund in its avoidance in recognizing that sexual abuse by clergy and church workers is a reality embedded in their structures.

## **THE FOCUS GROUP: THE EMBRYONIC TAMAR**

**What's in a name?** It will be seen how this small group of women, about twelve initially, sought to find another name for our group, to be succinctly relevant to its aims, objectives and biblical nuances.

During the late 1995 and 1996 much time was spent “just sitting around and talking”, from the particular to the general. It became evident that “the particular” was the power of story in the context of this collective being members of the sexual abused community. “The general” was the acceptance that hard work was needed to educate the patriarchal Church in the area of sexual abuse.

At the July meeting it was decided the name previously mentioned was too long. Finally, *Focus Group for Women on Sexual Abuse and the Anglican Church* or **Focus Group** (for short) was to be our name. Months later, an eye-catching name came into being and finally, the Focus Group morphed into the acronym TAMAR (Towards A More Appropriate Response). This name-change came about through an inspirational answer given to Faye Hansen, a clinical psychologist, who was studying for her B.Th.. Tamar's story of rape by her half-brother, Amnon, in 2 Samuel 13. She was told to keep silent, her life ruined.

Also, victims often tell themselves to keep silent. Why? The simple answer is: the subject has been, until recently, too much of a taboo to discuss publicly, especially in the Church. Also, for the survivors of sexual abuse, the personal fear-risk of being disbelieved is overwhelming.

Now it is 2021 and courageous women, Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins, have revealed their stories to the media, refusing to be silent. Sexual violence against women is now capturing the media's attention!

I believe that the MOW movement is even more relevant in to-day's world, and in particular for our Sydney Diocese, where we need women as Rectors.

Perhaps the biblical words, “In the beginning, darkness covered the earth”, is a fitting image to describe those historical past times, particularly in the context of the O.T. girl Tamar. She represents similar experiences of women and men over the centuries. After darkness there is always the dawn.

## **A NEW DAWN: 1996 AND ONWARDS**

1996. The TAMAR women knew that their personal histories of sexual abuse, used as story, was their collective strength. Also, most of the women had strong personal connections with many clergy, church workers and Sydney's Diocesan staff, together with some of the clergy elite. They also knew the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion and how Parish Councils, Parish Committees and Synod worked. They also knew the ‘language’ (jargon, or whatever) used by many, both clerical and lay, which can inhibit or close down sensitive, difficult or challenging conversations.

Peter Jensen, whom I had known for many years, when given my story of being a victim of clerical sexual misconduct, said “I believe you because I know you”. My reply was, “But would your response be the same

if you didn't know me?" However, the issue of sexual abuse per se was not discussed at that time. Nevertheless, that conversation served its purpose for me when he became Archbishop!

Sue Foley and I became co-presenters at the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian & New Zealand Conference on Sexual Exploitation by Health Professionals, Psychotherapists & Clergy at the University of Sydney, April 1996. We titled our presentation, *Who Hears? Who Listens? Who Pretends?*

Sue's presentation ended with her quoting from a letter in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, by Rev. Gregor Henderson:

The Church has to acknowledge at times, it has dealt poorly with complaints of sexual abuse to the point of disbelieving the truth when it has been spoken or at worst ignoring or suppressing it...unfortunately the latter is the current situation for Sydney Diocese Anglicans.

My presentation was *The Assumption of the Guilt of the Knave of Hearts; Who Hears? Who Listens? Who Pretends?*

If I were to ask, "Who stole the tarts?" the reply would be "The Knave of Hearts of course". Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, was probably one of the first male authors to raise the status of women, giving Alice undeniable talents; being able to discern, analyse, reflect, perceive, negotiate, question, challenge and articulate her thoughts. This list exactly replicates the talents of the women of TAMAR.

The Court Room scene, appointed in relation to the theft of the tarts, was in an uproar from the Judge to the onlookers. The Queen was unreasonable all of the time. The King tried to be reasonable some of the time. The Knave was not given a reasonable hearing. The Queen screamed, "Sentence first, verdict afterwards". The whole scene was similar to many of those in contemporary society and the Church. Actually, it became thus, TAMAR found, when trying to formally address the issue of sexual abuse within the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Sydney. For example, I was asked by a Diocesan official, "Why didn't you report your abuse to us?" Humm. Blame the Victim!

Alice was in one of her growing and changing phases, and similar to Alice, I began to change and grow, as did the other women of TAMAR.

## **THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF TAMAR**

To return momentarily to Alice, who asked the constantly disappearing, reappearing and irritating Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?" The Cat philosophically replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to". Sue Foley, Gwen Higginbotham, Faye Hansen, Fay Cameron, Sue Emeleus, Ruth Ellem, Ruth Champion, Janelle Benge, Deaconess Pattie Mutton, Rosemary Signorelli, Marlene Hickin, Shirley Seers and I knew the answer. We would definitely stay together and form a group, knowing that we were limited to evening meetings, 80% of the women being working professionals, as well as caring for their families, or extended families.

TAMAR (Towards A More Appropriate Response) was born on the 24 October, 1996. On that mild spring-time October evening, this miniscule group of Anglican women, through their experiential knowledge about spiritual bullying and child sexual abuse, together with their Christian spirituality of justice and mercy, became educators determined to address the issue of sexual abuse in the Anglican Church of Australia, with particular reference to the Diocese of Sydney. *Their persistence contributed to seeing the first sexual abuse protocol introduced in the Sydney Diocese.*

It is interesting to note that Archbishop Harry Goodhew, in his 1993 Synod address, mentioned, for the first time, the problem of sexual abuse by clergy and lay workers.

Since then, protocols and safe ministry initiatives have been achieved. TAMAR's involvement was paramount in bringing about these initiatives. As we worked, we were mindful of finding pathways of enquiry and understanding the complex issues surrounding sexual misconduct by clergy and others. We were also acutely aware of the need to address the issue from the perspective of a victim/survivor's sense of grief and loss, incorporating that as a major teaching module.

In 1996 Sue Foley and I reported to the Wood Royal Commission (1994-1997) which revealed the Diocese's inexcusable level of inaction that allowed an abusive Anglican rector to stay in his position at least 10 years.

Following the April conference, Sue Foley and I were invited to be presenters at an Anglican Western Sydney Regional Clergy Training Day Conference. This came about because both of us knew the Rev Alan Donohoo, Archdeacon of Parramatta Region. We held two sessions and were received cordially. However, during the last session it became apparent that some clergy were perplexed, one saying, "The very thought that an alleged perpetrator might be a fellow clergyman is just preposterous".

Sue asked me "Could you give a victim impact statement?" This was a startling and unfamiliar term for me. I did. The result was at first—silence—followed by approbation and affirmation from the conference participants. Our work had begun.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND LOW LIGHTS OF SOME OF TAMAR'S WORK

Some examples, as follows:

- **TAMAR, in partnership with Anglicare**, produced a video, *Behind Closed Doors*, plus a Workbook. And, also in partnership with Anglicare, *Too Much to Bear*, shown on Channel 10.
- **Philip Gerber, Lawyer**, Director of the Professional Standards Unit, said to us, "Some Diocesan personnel told him to be "wary of the TAMAR women". He was incredibly supportive of us.
- **Moore College**. The College's acceptance of TAMAR's proposal to conduct educative lectures to Year 1 & 2 students. This came about because the Principal, Peter Jensen, when he was a Curate at Dundas, was on my Sunday meal roster.
- **Perth**. I flew to Perth to confer with Peter Carnley, Archbishop of Perth and Primate of Australia. A one-hour appointment to discuss Inter-Diocesan transfer of clergy who had sexual abuse histories (re Duffield case). My proposal was for him to take this matter to General Synod. He was ten minutes late, took two phone calls and interruptions by staff. No sexual abuse in his Diocese! One year later his Diocese did have such a problem.
- **Adelaide & Melbourne**. Deaconess Pattie Mutton and Fay Cameron flew to Adelaide for General Synod to set up TAMAR's Information Table. I flew to Melbourne for a Women's Conference to introduce the work of TAMAR.
- **Stuart Piggins' book**, *Harry Goodhew*. Harry's diary: "Pattie Mayne, she had become one of his key advisors on appropriate protocols". (p.237).
- We were able to set up sessions throughout the Sydney Diocese's parishes to show the video *Behind Closed Doors*. The Diocese had sent the *Behind Closed Doors* work books/bible study material. It was very disappointing and difficult. Most Rectors were dis-interested. We had success only through women of TAMAR's parish connections. Always, the response was very poor.
- Archbishop Peter Jensen invited TAMAR members to Bishop's Court to say Thank You for our work.
- Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my husband Tom, for 66 years my best friend and helpmate (especially with computer chaos).

## CONCLUSION

There is so much more to say about the life and work of TAMAR. However, you will remember Alice asking the ridiculous Cheshire Cat which way she ought to go? The Cat's answer was philosophically vague.

Well, Alice said, "...so long as I get *somewhere*". Then the Cat added a significant proviso, "...if only you walk long enough".

This is exactly what TAMAR did for twelve years. We walked together while we sang, cried, hugged, grumbled, despaired, hoped, prayed, wrote, spoke, travelled, planned, experienced ragged feelings, enjoyed cakes and knocked on metaphorical doors of hearts and minds while endeavouring to follow the biblical injunction to "Seek Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly" with your God.