SRT: The Society, Religion and Technology project
Helping the church to engage with ethical issues in science

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Society, Religion and Technology Project
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- Set up in 1970 by the Church of Scotland
- Exploring ethical issues in current and future technology
- Engaging with:
  - research, industry, government/EC, regulators
- Multi-disciplinary
  - seeking balanced and informed assessment
- Christian ethical reflection applied to technology
- Addressed to policy makers and public debate
Some Basic Ethical Issues of Technology

• Limits – lines we decide *not* to cross even though we *could*?

• Intervention / Conservation – where does the balance lie?
  • environment, waste, animal-medical, long & short term

• Innovation / Risk
  • Uncertainty and precaution – whose burden of proof is it?

• Particular issues raised by each area:
  • energy, food, medicine, IT, communications, transport, etc.
  • Nuclear power, GM food, cloning and stem cells, genetic information, animal research, mobile phone masts, food miles, climate change, personal mobility and lifestyle ….
Some guiding principles

- **You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world**
  
  Matt. 5 v 13, 14

- **Wherever the church lacks a presence, that environment becomes impoverished of values and ethics**
  
  Fr. Claudio Paganini
  
  Four- Four- Two, Sept 2007

- **People generally don’t care what you believe unless they believe that you care**
Suicide

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among young men in Scotland
  - Overall male to female ratio is about 3:1, but the excess of male deaths is more pronounced among younger adults
- Many struggle to know how to deal with issues around suicide.
UK Suicide rates

Scotland: men
England: men
Wales: men
Northern Ireland: men
Scotland: women
England: women
Wales: women
Northern Ireland: women

Rate/100,000 pop
Years
Many questions

- Why did this happen?
- Why could we/I not stop it?
- Why did we/I not know this tragedy was going to happen?
• Death from suicide rouses range of responses
  – Grief
  – Anger
  – Helplessness
  – Guilt
  – Confusion
  – Puzzlement
  – Shame
• Families, friends and professionals
Risk groups

• Recognised risk factors include
  – mental ill-health
  – previous self-harm/ attempted suicide
  – Unemployment
  – Alcohol misuse/ dependency often a significant contributory factor in a variety of ways.
  – Social inequality: suicide rates approximately double in the most deprived areas are approximately four times higher than in the least deprived areas.
• At-risk groups include
  – Ex-prisoners
  – Young people leaving care
  – Those leaving the armed services
Suicide and self

- I thought that after swallowing all those pills, it would be simple - just a matter of time! I felt excited and exhilarated. For the first time in ages I felt happy and that I was at last in control of my own destiny.
Suicide and the church

• Suicide as a sin

• Can erect barriers(?)
  – Mowat et al (2006): Religion and Suicide: An Exploratory Study of the Role of the Church in Deaths by Suicide in Highland, Scotland

• Can be protective
Aimed at Kirk Sessions
– 8 page booklet
– Practical advice
Available to download from www.srtp.org.uk
Suicide prevention

• Someone *being there* with them can, literally, mean the difference between life and death

• A caring presence can bring strength and hope through even the darkest of times:
  – *The presence of others*
  – *The presence of the church*
  – *The presence of God.*
Resources

• Breathing Space
  – www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

• Beating the Blues:
  – http://www.beatingtheblues.co.uk/

• Choose Life
  – http://www.chooselife.net

• Samaritans:
  – http://www.samaritans.org/
Specifically bereavement by suicide

- Petals Support:  
  - http://www.petalsupport.com/
- Survivors of Bereavement by suicide:  
  - http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk/
- Cruse  
  - http://www.crusescotland.org.uk/
- Victim Support Scotland:  
  - http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk/
Training

• ASIST
  – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
• Choose Life

• Mental Health First Aid Scotland
Privilege to care

- The Church proclaims that Jesus came to bring “life in all its fullness”, and seeks to encourage all concerned to seek to help those approaching the end of their lives to experience as fulfilled a life as possible.
- Despite the inevitable sadness involved in saying farewell to a loved one, the church has a responsibility - and in some ways the privilege - to ensure that all participants in the process experience as fulfilled and comfortable a final journey as possible.
• “I spend my professional life caring for babies who are entirely dependent on others for their survival. I was recently reflecting on the experience of spoon-feeding my aging mother. Not only was this a reversal of roles, where she had previously encouraged me as a baby to “open wide for the choo-choo”, but this very interdependency was fundamental to what it means to be human. To be a burden, and to bear one another’s burdens, are part of what we are as people.”

Prof John Wyatt, Professor of Neonatology, University College London
• Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2