

Section 7: The issuing of apologies by Church Bodies

8 minutes read

Last updated: 22 March 2022

Version: 1

Requirements

7.1 Church Bodies must apologise to a victim or survivor:

- after the conviction of a Church Officer for abuse they committed against them.
- where there has been a finding (for example as part of civil proceedings or a CDM) that the alleged abuse is proven on the balance of probabilities.
- if it finds, after Independent Case Review(s) as outlined in relevant House of Bishop guidance, that previous allegations against a Church Officer have not been investigated or pursued in an appropriate manner. The apology will be for the lack of action about the original allegation and it should state a commitment to (re)investigate without delay.

7.2 In situations where these criteria are not met Church Bodies must consider whether to make an apology and, if so, when, irrespective of whether the Respondent is living or deceased.

7.3 In all circumstances, Church Bodies must take their own legal advice before issuing an apology, particularly whether any apology should be made with or without an admission of liability.

7.4 Senior leaders in the Church Body in which abuse occurred are responsible for organising and overseeing the issuing of an apology. In NST-led inquiries, this will be the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding.

7.5 Church Bodies must establish from the survivor their wishes in respect of the apology including who should make the apology, how it is communicated (e.g. in writing, in person, both) and the issues it should address. Wherever possible, the Church Body should comply with the victim's wishes.

7.6 Church Bodies must ensure that the apology is issued as soon as possible, subject to the particular circumstances of each situation.

7.7 If a victim or survivor requests that the senior leader of the Church Body issues the apology in person, that senior leader must be accompanied by an appropriate professional adviser, which could include the DSA / CSA.

7.8 The victim or survivor can be accompanied to this meeting by up to two people to support them.

7.9 If a living bishop or dean is the subject of the investigation or allegation, then any apology by the Church Body must involve the Archbishop for the relevant province.

7.10 Any apology issued by Church Bodies must express, in a candid and meaningful manner, sorrow and remorse for the harm that the victim or survivor has experienced. It must also convey the Church Body's understanding that it regards safeguarding as a core responsibility and having not successfully discharged this, it has caused a breach of the victim or survivor's trust.

7.11 When an apology is issued, if it is possible to do so, the Church Body must also explain the lessons that it has learnt from the incident and what it has done to prevent or reduce the chances of a recurrence.

7.12 As part of the act of apologising, Church Bodies must also initiate discussion about reconciliation between the Church and the victim or survivor. This work can be undertaken within a restorative practice framework – for example, giving the survivor the opportunity to explain the impact of the abuse on them, and what they need from the Church to heal. A Support Person with the requisite skills and training can undertake this work.

7.13 In following the requirements above, an apology will not be able to be made in all cases where allegations are made. Church Bodies must nevertheless give consideration to whether ongoing offers of support are still appropriate and consider different forms of reconciliation or restoration.

7.14 Professional safeguarding adviser (e.g. DSA/CSA) must be involved in these considerations.

Good Practice Advice

Apologies and liability

Church Bodies must offer an apology in the circumstances set out in paragraph 7.1. Where those circumstances are not met, Church Bodies should still consider whether it is appropriate for them to offer an apology in addition to any acknowledgement of what has happened to the victim and survivor.

Part 1 (section 2) of the Compensation Act 2006 makes clear that “offering an apology, an offer of treatment and other redress shall not in itself amount to an admission of negligence or a breach of statutory duty.” Any apology should take account of the particular circumstances of any matter and the Church Body should consider such action in consultation with professional advisers and their insurers.

Church Bodies should consider whether it is appropriate for them to offer an apology based on the available information or whether they need to investigate further.

Apologies and deceased Church Officers

Where an allegation is made against a deceased Church Officer, Church Bodies must take into account the fact that the deceased Church Officer cannot respond to the allegation. As a consequence, in such circumstances Church Bodies should undertake further investigation.

Church Officers must ensure that as part of the investigation reasonable steps are taken to identify any close living relation of the Respondent and to afford them (or someone on their behalf) an opportunity to make representations as part of the investigation process. Further, the investigation must take reasonable steps to obtain and examine evidence which might exonerate the Respondent. In an appropriate case this may require a public call for evidence. Any such investigation should also seek to identify material which supports the allegation.

Church Bodies should bear in mind that the close living relations of the deceased have a reasonable expectation of privacy and Church Bodies should ensure that they take appropriate advice about information sharing as part of any investigation.

Apologies and healing

Apologies can be therapeutically beneficial for victims and survivors, and support their healing. When issuing an apology, Church Bodies can draw on the Church’s teachings on the need to express and demonstrate ownership of one’s sins and ask God for forgiveness. Translating this into the relationship between the Church and victims and survivors, this means that where Church Officers have harmed people, the Church Body should “own” that sin. Furthermore, with humility, the Church Body should ask the victim or survivor how it can repair and redress the harm caused.

Apologies by Church Bodies: illustrative content

- **Acknowledge the harm caused** - To begin repairing the harm caused, Church Bodies should explain in their apologies that that they have understood the emotional or physical harm that the victim / survivor has experienced.
- **Renounce the act** – Church Bodies should state in the apology that what the victim / survivor has experienced was wrong and should not have happened. If there has been a formal investigation, the apology can restate the facts of the outcome and Church’s renunciation of the acts of the Church Officer(s).
- **Explore atonement** – Church Bodies should invite the victim / survivor to discuss how the Church Body can atone for the harm caused.
- **Reassure the victim** – Church Bodies should explain the measures taken to prevent recurrence of the harm caused.
- **Show appropriate values** – the Church Body should demonstrate sorrow and repentance for its actions or the sinful activities of the Church Officer(s).

Adapted from DeYoung, K. (2018). [Toward a theology of apology](#)

Involving Support Persons

Where appropriate, Church Bodies should involve the Support Person to liaise with victims and survivors before issuing apologies. The purpose of this is to identify what victims or survivors want apologies to express, whether they want public announcements or private conversations with clergy, and how they want written apologies delivered to them.

Support Persons should also clarify with victims and survivors whether they want apologies to be delivered in their home, on the premises of the Church Body or at another appropriate location, to avoid re-traumatisation.

How Church Bodies should deliver apologies

To effectively support the victim or survivor’s healing and recovery, apologies need to address their needs. They should show sincerity and the language and tone should reflect the magnitude of the transgression. Therefore, when Church Bodies issue apologies, they should fully consult with the victim or survivor to determine how, when and where they want the apology to be made to them. Some victims or survivors may want a written apology, others may require a verbal apology; and depending on their faith, others may want one expressed in the Church’s teachings and led by senior clergy.

Senior clergy (Archbishop, bishop, dean) are the figureheads of the Church and they should oversee this work, ensuring that they involve their safeguarding teams. The DSA or CSA should sign-off any letters of apology and attend any meetings with victims and survivors.

Where a victim or survivor requests the Church Body to issue an apology in person, Church Bodies should ensure that the conditions below are met. This is a minimum threshold and the tone and disposition of Church Officers should be to listen, acknowledge the harm caused and show contrition on behalf of the Church.

- The victim or survivor should be asked who they wish to represent the Church to issue the apology.
- The survivor and victim should be encouraged and supported to attend the meeting with up to two people of their choice.
- The person representing the Church Body should start by explaining the purpose of the meeting and restate the profound sorrow of the Church for the abuse caused to the victim or survivor.
- The victim and survivor should be invited to talk about any aspect of the abuse they experienced and how it has impacted on them. This can have profound therapeutic and emotional benefit for them.
- The representatives of the Church Body should listen and demonstrate empathy and evidence of acknowledgement of the harm caused to the victim or survivor. They should explain lessons learnt from the investigations and what the Church Body will do to prevent recurrence.

This document is version 1 and was printed on 16 April 2024. The most up to date version of this policy can be found on the Church of England website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding>

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/responding-victims-and-survivors-abuse/section-7-issuing>