Good morning Synod.

When I took on the role of Lead Safeguarding Bishop, some four years ago, it would be fair to say that I didn’t really know all that I was getting into. As I have often said, “I am not a safeguarding professional”.

As I get ready to pass the lead safeguarding responsibility to Jonathan Gibbs, Bishop of Huddersfield, I reflect on these years – an experience and privilege I will never forget. The IICSA hearings, the conversations with victims and survivors, the learning lessons reviews. All of this together has had a deep and profound impact upon me. At times, I have been left angry and bitterly ashamed at how the Church I love has behaved, but I have also seen light being shone into dark places.

The past four years has been an important period for the Church in its safeguarding work. Significant progress has been made. The Church has improved governance, invested significantly in posts, training, and audits. It has developed a suite of guidance, procedure and policy, and in doing so has taken necessary steps towards a safer system that seeks to prevent abuse. We can and should celebrate some of our safeguarding achievements:

* Circa 250,000 people have now completed safeguarding training.
* We have an independent National Safeguarding Panel, acting as our critical friend and supporting national safeguarding governance.
* Safeguarding is embedded into our recruitment processes for clergy and church officers.

Yet these developments, whilst incredibly welcome, have come about too slowly. We have much further to travel on our safeguarding journey.

As Lead Bishop for safeguarding, I have seen first-hand that there remains a very real danger that when safeguarding is discussed in the Church, that we still experience it as something “other”, as someone else’s responsibility.

I said at the start “I am not a safeguarding professional”. But as a Bishop, I know that safeguarding must be at the very heart of all our work in the Church, embedded in our theology, in our practice and our policies. We must remember that safeguarding affects us all; every member of this Synod and every member of the Church have safeguarding responsibilities.

I shall be pleased to welcome the amendment which is being brought by the Bishop of Huddersfield and am grateful to him for this. The amendment calls for a more fully survivor centred approach and a commitment to exploring options for redress. I endorse the spirit of this amendment and hope that Synod will accept it. We must all work together to make the Church a safer place for everyone and one that responds with care, compassion and professionalism to victims and survivors.

So, as we come to this debate, I ask you to remember that victims and survivors of abuse are amongst us today. I hope that we will be able to hear a wide range of voices, and consider calls for change, whilst respecting the very real sensitivities involved.

To begin, I’d like to give you a brief background into the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, or IICSA. The Inquiry was established in March 2015 by the government to consider the growing evidence of institutional failures to protect children from child sexual abuse and to make recommendations to ensure the best possible protection for children in the future. Some estimates suggest that one child in every twenty in the United Kingdom has been sexually abused.

The Inquiry also incorporates The Truth Project, which offers victims and survivors of abuse the opportunity to share their experience in writing, on the telephone, or in person. To date, over 4,000 people have come forward to The Truth Project.

In May 2019, The Truth Project published a thematic report into child sexual abuse in religious institutions. It provides powerful qualitative and quantative evidence that sexual abuse in a religious setting is a terrible breach of trust, a breach of faith and an abuse of power. In their findings they note that individual perpetrators were afforded trust and high standing, where their actions were never questioned and their ability to abuse never contemplated.

The investigations into the sexual abuse of children in the Church of England came following an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury. To date, there have been three public hearings:

* In March 2018, there was a three-week hearing into the Diocese of Chichester, which considered the multiple allegations of sexual abuse which had occurred there and the resulting investigations.
* In July 2018, there was a one-week inquiry into the case study of Peter Ball, the former Bishop of Lewes and subsequent Bishop of Gloucester.
* In July 2019, there was a further two-week hearing on safeguarding in the Church more widely. This considered whether themes identified in the first hearings were national issues and four Dioceses were chosen as ‘sample Dioceses’ for a ‘deep dive analysis’.

Throughout these hearings, the powerful testimonies of victims and survivors of sexual abuse in the Church have provided the strongest evidence that our safeguarding journey is far from done. Listening to their accounts has been deeply moving and often harrowing. I commend their bravery and thank them for coming forward. These are voices we need to hear.

The Inquiry has also heard from staff throughout the Church – from Parish Safeguarding Officers to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. In all our engagement with IICSA, we have sought to be open and transparent, welcoming the opportunity to explore our safeguarding practice and seeking ways to move it forward.

In May 2019, the Inquiry published its interim report into the Anglican Church, focusing on the first two case study hearings – Chichester and Peter Ball. We anticipate that the Inquiry will publish a further report on safeguarding in the Church later this year and we recognise and acknowledge that there will be more recommendations and further matters to consider.

The National Safeguarding Team have put strenuous efforts into identifying the key themes which have emerged from the IICSA hearings: including our response to victims and survivors, issues with the Clergy Discipline Measure and oversight of safeguarding. Synod will be pleased to hear that we are already working to address these and other issues, and to build them into our safeguarding practice.

Today though, this Synod is asked to consider the first report we have received from the Inquiry, which gave 5 key early recommendations. These are outlined in GS2158. I would emphasise that all 5 of these recommendations have been welcomed and accepted by the Church in their entirety. I hope that Synod will see from the paper that we have already taken several significant steps in our efforts to implement them.

I look forward to hearing this debate and encourage Synod to give unequivocal support to the motion before us this morning.

Peter