**+Jonathan Gibbs – Introduction to Safeguarding Debate – Item 17 – Saturday 9th July 2022**

Thank you, Chair.

Synod, I would like to begin by thanking Meg Munn and the members of the ISB for their presentation and for all they are doing to hold the Church to account in respect to safeguarding. Thank you very much – and please keep on challenging us.

I would also like to thank all of you, members of Synod, for your engagement with safeguarding matters, as well as that of your colleagues in dioceses, cathedrals, parishes and other church communities up and down this country. Thank you for all you are doing.

Most of all, however, I would like to start by acknowledging the impact of our safeguarding failures over the years on the lives of victims and survivors; and to thank *them* for their willingness to go on engaging with us and challenging us to *put things right* from the past and to *get things right* for the future.

Synod, my intention in framing the motion as it stands before you today is to help us understand more fully the context in which we find ourselves in regard to safeguarding, and then to try to re-frame the discussion in a way that can enable us to move forward together as constructively and as quickly as possible.

If you look at [GS Misc 1320](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/GS%20Misc%201320%20NST%20update.pdf), you will see that I sought to address four questions in my introduction to the NST’s report. These were:

* Where have we come from?
* Where are we trying to get to?
* Why does everything seem so difficult? And,
* How can we best move forward?

I would like to say a little about each of these before turning to the detail of the motion before you at Item 17.

Firstly, **where have we come from?** We have to begin – as does today’s motion – with a frank acknowledgement of our past failures. Terrible things happened far too often across our Church, and there was a collective failure to recognise and respond adequately, even when abuse was disclosed. We still have a long way to go to put these things right, including through the establishment of a comprehensive redress scheme – and Synod I need you to keep on pushing to make sure these things happen as soon as possible.

At the same time, it is also right for us to acknowledge the significant changes there have been nationally, in dioceses and in parishes, in recent years, including improvements in safeguarding procedures and training. In many ways, we have come a long way, and I want to say a big thank you to everyone who has made that possible. Thank you for all that you and your colleagues are doing.

Secondly, in the midst of all the difficulties and challenges that we face, it is important to remind ourselves ***where we are trying to get to.***

Our shared goal is to make our church communities the safest and healthiest places for all people that they can be – places where every single person is protected and nurtured and supported – and that must include providing appropriate redress, financially as well as in other ways, to those who have been abused as soon as possible.

Synod – these things are what all of us who are engaged in the work of safeguarding are committed to – and yet sometimes we seem collectively to lose sight of that! Our safeguarding colleagues, whether in our dioceses or in the national church, can at times become a lightning conductor for people’s anger and frustration. Sometimes that is because they have got things wrong, and sometimes it is simply because they are standing in the breach *on our behalf.* We need to remember that and to look after them, as well as being ready to hold them to account when things go wrong! And at this point I would like to say a huge thank you to Zena Marshall for stepping into the role of Interim National Director over the last 18 months. Zena has been an outstanding colleague and has provided great leadership to the NST. We are delighted she will be staying on as Alex Kubeyinje joins as the new National Director in September.

And that brings me to my third question – **why does everything seem so difficult?**

Synod, we need to recognise that there is a lot of pain and hurt and anger around, because of all that has happened – or in some cases, not yet happened. Because people’s experience of how we respond is still not consistently and universally as good as it should be. And because we have not yet adequately addressed the past by providing appropriate redress, both financially and in other ways.

We also need to recognise that the experience of those who are the subject of allegations or concerns is not consistently as good as it should be – and we know that can also be deeply traumatising for those who are affected.

These are some of the reasons why the whole subject of safeguarding can be so fraught and so difficult. We need to acknowledge that and do all we can to address the reasons for that.

And so we come to my final question – **How can we best move forward?**

Synod, I wonder whether it may help if we recognise more fully the incredibly difficult situation we have been and are facing around safeguarding. The revelations of the last few years have hit us like an earthquake and we are still living through the aftershocks of that, coming to terms with what has happened and working out how to rebuild in new and safer ways for the future.

After the initial response to IICSA and the greatly increased focus on safeguarding over the last few years, we are now going through a time both of much-needed change and of anger and disillusionment about the pace and depth of that change.

This can be incredibly frustrating at times – and a source of anger especially for victims and survivors. I personally have been deeply frustrated that we have not got further during my term as Lead Bishop. I simply had not realised how complex and difficult it would be – and is still proving to be – to bring about deep and lasting change across the Church of England.

But Synod, I am convinced that it is happening and we need to persevere. We need to press forward and make sure the resources are there to see this through, as quickly and effectively as possible – and that applies especially to finding ways of making redress happen even before we have jumped through all the legislative hoops, even though in the end that may also be required. *We need if necessary to throw the kitchen sink at this – because getting this right is fundamental to the integrity and credibility of the Church in this nation.*

And that is what the motion before you today is about:

* It acknowledges past failures and the need to work especially with victims and survivors to put things right from the past and to get things right in the future.
* It recognises the challenges involved in bringing about change across such a diverse and dispersed institution as the Church of England.
* It urges the Archbishops’ Council to ensure that IICSA’s recommendations – including for redress – are fully implemented as soon as possible.
* And it affirms and reinforces Synod’s role in holding the Archbishops’ Council and wider church to account, particularly around strengthening independent accountability and oversight of safeguarding across the Church of England.

Synod, we know we have not always got things right – and that there is still much more to be done – but I hope you will put your weight behind this motion and affirm your commitment to making the Church of England ever more fully a reflection of Jesus’ reign of justice and healing and peace for all. Thank you.