

Statement from Bishop of Guildford, Andrew Watson:

I am one of the survivors of John Smyth's appalling activities in the late 1970s and early '80s. I am also one of the Bishops in the Church of England. This has placed me in a unique and challenging position when it comes to the events of the past few days. My own story is certainly less traumatic than that of some others. I was drawn into the Smyth circle, as they were, and the beating I endured in the infamous garden shed was violent, excruciating and shocking; but it was thankfully a one-off experience never to be repeated. A while later one of my friends attempted suicide on the eve of another session in the shed (a story movingly told in the Channel 4 Report), and at that point I and a friend shared our story.

I have been in contact with the Hampshire police over the weekend, and as such it would not be appropriate to say much more at this time, except that my profoundest prayers are with all those affected by this, and my heartfelt desire is that lessons might be learnt so this never happens again. I am grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his apology to survivors on behalf of the Church, and don't begin to believe that he knew anything of Smyth's violent activities until his office was informed in 2013.

I would also like to express the concern of myself and some of my fellow survivors that we are seen as people and not used as pawns in some political or religious game. Abusers espouse all theologies and none; and absolutely nothing that happened in the Smyth shed was the natural fruit of any Christian theology that I've come across before or since. It was abuse perpetrated by a misguided, manipulative and dangerous man, tragically playing on the longing of his young victims to live godly lives.

+Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford

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