

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Lincoln have met together to pray and discuss next steps following the conclusion of the clergy disciplinary process instigated after the Bishop's suspension in May 2019 and subsequent investigation.

The Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Lowson, has accepted a penalty for misconduct in relation to the management of one safeguarding issue. At their meeting the Archbishop apologised to the Bishop for the long process that he has endured. The Archbishop expressed his full support for the Bishop as he now begins the process of returning to ministry as the Bishop of Lincoln.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said: "I am very sorry that Bishop Christopher and his wife Susan have had to endure such an ordeal over the last 20 months. I have expressed my regret to Christopher and am very grateful to him for the gracious way he has responded. I want to make it clear that I am fully supportive of Christopher returning to ministry as the Bishop of Lincoln. We have both agreed that there are many lessons we and the Church need to learn from this very difficult season, as we also continue to learn lessons from the scrutiny of IICSA which highlighted our poor response to survivors.

"I also want to express my thanks to all in the Diocese of Lincoln and especially Bishop David and Bishop Nicholas for their hard work in taking forward the life of the diocese in particular in responding to the extraordinary demands of the pandemic and working to shape the church for mission in the coming generations.

"I look forward to visiting Lincoln, once the pandemic allows, to pray with Bishop Christopher and his colleagues. Given the length of his absence from the diocese, Bishop Christopher will now need to take time to renew his relationships with colleagues in Lincoln and this is where his focus will be over the coming weeks. I welcome his return to ministry and have asked him to pray for me as I also pray for him."

The Bishop of Lincoln said: "I offer an unreserved apology for my error of judgement in the way I handled a disclosure about a member of clergy in the Lincoln diocese in early 2019. I regret the way I handled the matter, not least because I have always sought to take safeguarding matters extremely seriously.

"Throughout the disciplinary process I have sought to cooperate fully, conscious of the importance of ensuring a thorough investigation for all involved. However, the length of the process has not benefited anyone. I hope that some constructive reflection on this experience might help to improve the Church's safeguarding and disciplinary procedures.

"I am enormously grateful to Bishop David Court, the Bishop of Grimsby, who has led the Diocese of Lincoln during my absence, and to those who have supported him through what has been a very challenging period for all. The churches, clergy and people of Lincolnshire have remained in my thoughts and prayers over the last 20 months and I look forward to returning to serve the Diocese as soon as practicable."

The Bishop of Grimsby, David Court, said: "Both Bishop Nicholas and I would like to express our thanks and gratitude for the support and encouragement we have been given by so many in the diocese over the last twenty months. We continue to be absolutely committed to good safeguarding in the diocese and we now look forward to welcoming Bishop Christopher back and working again closely with him as we seek together to serve the people and church here in Greater Lincolnshire."

Statement from National Safeguarding Team (NST)

Following the conclusion of the clergy discipline process the NST will now, according to House of Bishops guidance, consider how best to identify and learn lessons from this case. While we are aware the process has taken far too long and apologise for the effect this has had on all involved, when safeguarding matters are raised with the Church it is absolutely right that we respond. The concerns raised about Bishop Christopher have now been fully dealt with but we are continuing to look at separate issues raised during the course of this process, which to be clear do not relate to Bishop Christopher and predate his time in the diocese. This has been a difficult period for all in the diocese and support is being offered as we continue to work towards making the Church a safer place for all.

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