

**Presentation to General Synod, February 2018 from Bishop of Bath & Wells, Peter Hancock, Church of England's lead safeguarding bishop**

Members of Synod. This morning I want to give you a brief overview of the work that is happening nationally with regards to safeguarding and the preparations for the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(IICSA\)](#). The first public hearing for us as a Church is now only a matter of weeks away.

Before I do so, I would like to thank you for your prayers for me as I have sought to serve as the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding over the last 18 months. I am also grateful to those around me that help me to fulfil this task and pick me up and dust me off every so often and I include in that not just members of Synod but also some of those who are themselves victims of abuse some of whom are in the gallery today. I am grateful to you for the courtesy you have shown me. I also wish to record my admiration for the increasing professionalism of the people we now employ across our dioceses and nationally to give us good quality advice and guidance in what are often difficult and complex situations to manage. But more importantly, I want to pay tribute to victims and survivors of abuse, regardless of their age or the circumstances in which the abuse took place or how long ago it took place. I have been humbled by their courage. Telling their story helps the Church improve its safeguarding responses, but requires them to re-live their experiences. On behalf of Synod I want to acknowledge the pain that is evident in the experiences of survivors who contributed to the 'We asked for Bread but you gave us Stones' leaflet. That leaflet raises some important issues and ideas for the future about how the Church responds to survivors and I and others will consider that. For too long, the Church has not responded well to those who allege abuse within our church communities. This is now changing and further change is needed.

So let me turn now to my presentation. Who are we? The Church of England is in a unique position in our country. We provide services to children, young people and vulnerable adults. We have a presence in every community. We have a calling and purpose, a mission to share the Good News of Christ with all, a particular concern for the poor and as the established Church we have influence and power. We must discern how to use this influence wisely and ensure we do not misuse our power.

Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the Church, to the Gospel message. It is essentially about promoting the wellbeing of all. It is about protecting those who are vulnerable, children, young people and adults at risk of abuse and it is about preventing abuse from occurring in the first place.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility regardless of what role we may have. Good safeguarding practice must be embedded within all of our church bodies and communities across the whole church. We cannot operate alone. We must collaborate with our statutory, voluntary and ecumenical partners.

Safeguarding is about partnership with the wider communities that we seek to serve and transform. What good safeguarding looks like is defined in our Policy '[Promoting a Safer Church](#)' – I urge you to read this if you haven't already done so. It's an essential and easy read!

So how are we working to embed safeguarding in all we do? Our National Safeguarding Framework outlines a number of key foundations to this. Each of these are essential factors in building a safer church. This is about improving the consistency and quality of our safeguarding practices and arrangements.

So what do we have in place? I think it is fair to say that we started from a low base, particularly nationally but there has been a five-fold increase in resources since 2014. Every diocese now has a professionally skilled Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, DSA. Most have a Safeguarding Team. As Synod members, take time to get to know them and encourage them and to see how they are. This is not easy work, they need to be valued. The vast majority of casework takes place in dioceses. All dioceses should now have arrangements in place to provide support to survivors and the National Safeguarding Team have commissioned independent research to help identify ways to strengthen this support. With the Roman Catholic Church, we are now moving forward on the Safe Spaces Project and I am pleased to say that the newly appointed Project Manager is with us today. All dioceses should also have in place individuals who can support those who have been accused or who are subject to a safeguarding allegation. This is about a holistic response to safeguarding.

Synod has taken steps to improve consistency through legislation, strengthening powers to suspend or risk assess, for example. There is now a duty to have regard to House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding. The frontline of safeguarding is the parish and the diocese; and the NST are producing a Parish Safeguarding Handbook to support this.

Many of you will have attended safeguarding training in your dioceses, based on the National Framework. I will pause for a moment to allow you to digest the figures which do not include face-to-face training delivered locally in your dioceses.

**As at end of December 2017:**

- **11,269 completed CO (Basic) online training**
- **To date, 900 completed C1 online (only launched on 11th December 2017)**
- **Significant numbers trained face-to-face across diocese**
- **18,917 people registered to complete online training since spring 2017**
- **682 Bishops and senior staff completed C4 (handling disclosures) training across 29 dioceses**

Every diocese has now been independently audited in respect of their safeguarding arrangements. We remain the only denomination I believe to have done this in England. We are now extending these independent audits to all cathedrals and the Archbishops'

offices. Furthermore, the House of Bishops asked for more work to strengthen independent oversight and scrutiny.

So what is the scale of safeguarding activity. You have seen these figures already but it is worth reminding Synod of my response to a supplementary question on Thursday. It tells a story of the Church as the 'ears and eyes' of our local communities. It also highlights our role as a community of faith that is prepared to welcome all, even those who present a known risk to others, but to do so with safeguards in place.

But there are challenges for us to face. The need for greater consistency in what we do. The complexity of our structures. Aspects of our culture which have, and continue to, stop people from reporting their abuse or which undermine our desire to respond well.

Whilst I strongly believe that we are making progress, we need to accelerate the pace of this change. This has been made clear to us in recent independent learning lessons reviews by [Dame Moira Gibb](#) and [Lord Carlile](#). In July, I hope that we may have a further debate on safeguarding. We need to ask ourselves the question how do we embed safeguarding as part of the mission and culture of the church, and how can we accelerate the pace of change?

So let me turn now to [IICSA](#), the independent statutory inquiry into child sexual abuse. The Anglican Church is one of 13 investigations into how well institutions have protected children from sexual abuse and how well they have and are responding to adult survivors of abuse.

How we approach the Inquiry says a lot about the Church and who we are and strive to be as Christians. We need to listen with humility to survivors' stories and acknowledge past failures where they have occurred. We must and are approaching the Inquiry with openness and transparency. And we must approach it with a genuine desire to learn and to improve.

Within the Anglican investigation we are currently one of 39 core participants. To date we have disclosed over 25,000 documents and submitted 36 witness statements with more to follow.

The first Public Hearing starts on 5 March on the Case Study of the Diocese of Chichester. It is expected to last three weeks. A second Public Hearing takes place at the end of July on Peter Ball and a further hearing is expected in 2019. Synod, this will not be an easy couple of years – we will hear deeply painful accounts of abuse, of poor response, of 'cover-up'. We will, as our friends in the Anglican Church in Australia did, feel a deep sense of shame. But we must face this together, as a whole Church, together. Not because we are concerned to protect our reputation but because we believe it is God's Church. We believe in a message of hope. We believe that this Gospel message can and will transform lives and bring people, including those who have been abused, into a place of wholeness and healing.

So what can we do to reduce abuse from taking place in our churches? We can take steps to create open, healthy and protective communities. We can make sure that children have a voice and are a visible and valued part of our church life? We can talk to young people about their online and social media safety? We must be rigorous about ensuring that we recruit safely to all roles with the church and provide people with guidance as to how to act safely? We can ask questions about the pastoral support we give to people who are affected by safeguarding matters.

And finally members of Synod, how will we know we have got there? All of these things and more. Most important when we hear direct and positive accounts from survivors. In saying this, I am acutely aware that there are survivors in the Assembly Hall who cannot testify to this and remain deeply mistrustful, suspicious and angry towards the Church. We cannot simply walk away from safeguarding or hand the responsibility over to someone else. We are all responsible and need the courage not just to admit our failures but to make the progress that is needed.

Thank You.