

**General Synod Safeguarding presentation from Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, February 2018**

Responding to the safeguarding failures in the diocese of Chichester has been a formative, life changing experience for me and for my colleagues. Preparing for giving evidence to [IICSA, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) next month has been a demanding task, and we have welcomed the opportunity to review what has been done to identify and address the failures of the past in our diocese.

I want to pay tribute to the work of our diocesan safeguarding team, led by Colin Perkins, and to the support he has had from successive diocesan secretaries, Angela Sibson and Gabrielle Higgins. Creating a diocese in which safeguarding best practice is uniformly a top priority can only be done by determined and effective teamwork. Here are some observations on the experience of seeking to achieve that goal.

First, survivors are people, not a tricky problem to be solved. Sometimes they are even blamed for causing trouble. But no one should underestimate what it takes to make an allegation, to relive the abuse, to undergo the inevitable processes of forensic enquiry, and to face again the devastating possibility of not being believed.

Second, how much do we invest in safeguarding? This must include accessible and good quality training ([the new on-line C1](#) training is really excellent) as well as ensuring proper resourcing for our response to survivors with the care and support they need. We cannot expect to be taken seriously if we talk about safeguarding but fund it inadequately, especially at diocesan level.

Third, we have to be capable of learning from others about what we have done wrong, and how that happened.

In Chichester our safeguarding team has helped us to learn from survivors that:

- There is never an excuse. Nothing excuses the criminal misuse of power in sexual abuse, which can destroy so many aspects of life, including faith in God and membership of the church, that were in store for an abused person.
- A prolonged period of denial, particularly by the church when we fail to face up to our responsibilities in this matter, can reinforced the damage done by the abuse itself. It becomes a double abuse. And for that we must now be aware that there is also no excuse.
- We cannot hide behind formality and status; communication must be obviously authentic, and from the heart. No matter how much drafting a lawyer has had to do, legal phrases and piety are no substitute for being honest and human, and genuinely sorry.
- We must never privilege the institution of the church above the inviolable dignity of a human person, especially a vulnerable person.
- Abuse takes many forms and it is never safe to imagine that only a certain sort of person abuses, or that you can predict who is vulnerable and who is not.
- The consequences of abuse are manifold; first, for the victim, of course, but also for a congregation, for a local community, and for others, such as a spouse, children, parents and close friends of an abuser; we also have a duty of care for them.

We have also benefitted, sometimes uncomfortably, from the capacity of investigative journalism, at its best, to give a voice to the voiceless, and to say in public what we might not have wanted to hear.

Finally, where do we find hope?

Having to rebuild trust with statutory agencies has, I hope, made us look at ourselves more honestly and humbly. It has made us realise that others might have higher expectations of us as a contributor to society than sometimes we have had of ourselves; that safeguarding is one of the demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a matter of evangelical practice; and robust, regularly updated policies, training, and fairness and consistency in safeguarding practice are vital for dispelling fear.

And fear is dangerous. It's what makes people secretive and deceptive; it's why we tell lies to ourselves and to others.

The experience of serving in Chichester for the past five years has deepened my attention to Jesus Christ in the scandal of the cross as the interface between human degradation in an extreme form and the divine beauty. This is where the absence of God is hollowed out within us. We sit in the dust of shame, where familiar words can be heard with new power and force: they are spoken by a scarred and risen Lord, who says to us, whoever we are, "Do not be afraid".