**General Synod Safeguarding presentation from Sir Roger Singleton, February 2018**

Members of Synod

1.  Thank you for the opportunity to share with you some thoughts about how the Church can move from having a shameful record in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults to one where it can be quietly confident that it has done all it reasonably can to ensure that <u>best</u> practice becomes <u>universal</u> practice.

2.  In recent years the Church has done some useful work.  Nationally it has developed a comprehensive set of safeguarding policies and guidance; there is a National Safeguarding Team and much strengthened safeguarding teams in dioceses; there are extensive packages of training; work with victims and survivors has made a little progress though an enormous amount remains to be done; and a system of independent assessment of diocesan safeguarding has been developed.

3.  But, despite all this activity, there is a common theme running through recent reports of audits, reviews and inquiries.  That is a continuing need for <u>culture</u> change within the Church.  This can be found in Dame Moira Gibb's recent [report on Peter Ball;](#) in the Archbishop of York's preface to the Cahill report concerning Robert Waddington; in many of the audit reports into diocesan safeguarding arrangements; and in the recent publication "We asked

for Bread but you gave us Stones".   As the Faith and Order Commission's publication "[The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church](#)" put it:

"Changing the culture of the Church so that safeguarding becomes fully embedded within it as an outworking of the gospel is a key objective."

And my own experience of carrying out an assessment of the adequacy of the Past Cases Review conducted by dioceses a decade ago clearly points to the need for attitudinal change towards abusive behaviours within the Church, their perpetrators, victims and survivors.

4.   So, what do we mean by Culture?   There is a whole academic literature on the nature of culture and theories of cultural change adorn our business schools and institutes of management.   But I find it helpful to opt for simple definitions.   Culture is how many people in an organisation <u>think, feel and</u> <u>act.</u> And  in the context  of the Church, we could add – <u>believe.</u>

5.   Within the many theories of cultural change, a recurring theme is the need for strong leadership.   Those of you in leadership positions may be groaning inwardly at this point.   How often have you been told that you need to provide leadership in an ever lengthening list of issues – spiritual, theological, mission, pastoral, human resourcing, buildings, health and safety etc to which, I have to add, safeguarding.   I am heartened by the positive affirmation which our

archbishops, diocesan bishops and deans continue to give to the importance of creating and sustaining a safe Church.   But we need to extend the concept of leadership further if we are to protect children and vulnerable adults adequately.   It is the actions of people in parishes and the commitment of parish clergy and senior parish laity which are critical.   And experience of this, whilst improving, is still variable.   I believe a tipping point has been reached where most clergy are informed, supportive of their parish safeguarding representatives and willing to tackle reluctant church wardens or PCCs.   But ambivalence, even hostility, continues with a minority who appear unable or unwilling to accept the need for sensible, proportionate measures; or who minimise the adverse impacts which physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual abuse can have on people's lives; or who believe that complainants are only in it for the money.

6.   A second consistent theme of the literature on cultural change is the need to define specifically the issues you are trying to fix.   If all we do is talk vaguely about the need for cultural change we will still be debating it in 10 years time and much will be the same.   Cultural change can be brought about by leaders determining, in every community in which they serve, whether secular or religious, the differences that need to be made.

7.  Let's just step outside the immediate context of the Church for a moment. During my years as Chair of the Independent Safeguarding Authority – a Home Office agency whose remit was to decide who should be statutorily barred from working with children and vulnerable adults – I noted that schools, clubs, foster homes and residential care homes who were <u>least</u> likely to contain abusers were those:

*   Where leaders were familiar with the signs of abuse and neglect

*   Where leaders had some understanding of how abusers behave by grooming or exercising power and influence over their victims

*   Where organisations had open and acknowledged channels for concerns to be appropriately expressed

*   Where children and young people could talk about the good things which helped to keep them safe and who they would talk to if they were worried about their safety or that of a friend and

*   Where abuse had occurred, the victim or survivor received prompt and attentive responses and the support of an independent and trusted friend.

8.  Returning to the Church environment, actions which might contribute to culture change include:

- Improving the consideration given to the annual safeguarding report at the PCC meeting so that there is an educational element about abuse and safeguarding

- Improving the effectiveness of the Archdeacon's articles of enquiry into safeguarding  so they are not just a tick-box exercise and explore what training has been provided, whether there are any current circumstances of concern and if so, what is being done about them

- Grasping the nettle of dealing with clergy,  readers, priests with PTO and lay leaders who persistently fail to attend training opportunities or speak disparagingly about reasonable safeguarding measures

-  Including in ordinands' training and continuing ministerial development awareness of the exceptional  imbalances of influence and power which those with the sacred trust possess

- Including in all interviews of clergy and lay employees a rigorous exploration of attitudes to abuse, neglect, safeguarding and ways to respond to victims and survivors

- Ensuring that occasional stories of the ludicrous application of the vetting rules do not become an excuse for dispensing with DBS checks on those whose role requires them and

- Providing those victims and survivors who are prepared to share their experiences with appropriate opportunities to do so

Each church community can develop its own list of behaviours and attitudes which need to change and think through ways of bringing these about. Because once we are clear about the differences we wish to achieve then the somewhat amorphous concept of cultural change can be translated into tangible actions which, with determination and persistence, can be progressed.

9.  So, in summary, I am fundamentally optimistic that the Church recognises the <u>need</u> for culture change and <u>wishes</u> it to happen.   But analysis should not be confused with action.   I hope that leaders throughout the Church, from the glories of Church House to the tiniest rural parish and in whatever context they exercise influence and jurisdiction, will convert the overall objective of culture change into practical, pragmatic steps which can be taken.   I believe that is the road to achieving a Church which has learned from past failures and can look forward to offering safe and welcoming communities especially to children and vulnerable people.

Thank you for listening.

10 February 2018