

Bishop of Bath and Wells Peter Hancock speech on Safeguarding

Thank you, Mr Chair. Good morning Synod.

I would like to echo the Chair's warm welcome and the greetings that he has given to those who are watching this debate, those in the public gallery and those who will be watching us online. I am also aware that among us there are within Synod a number who are themselves victims and survivors of abuse. Synod will also know that there are a number of people who have come to York especially to hear this debate. I am very grateful to them, and I and other members of Synod had the opportunity to meet with several of you last evening at the safeguarding event and to hear some of your personal experiences. It is very important that you are with us here for this Synod but I am also aware that for them being here is not easy.

We have just heard a very clear, a very powerful presentation from Sheila Fish and Jo Kind. I speak for Synod when I say that we are very grateful to them for their directness and their honesty and also please note Synod the challenge that they have brought to us. Their words have at times not been easy to hear, but we thank them and especially are grateful to them for engaging so frankly with us. In speaking to Synod, I hope that I am correct in saying that together with Synod that we feel and believe that they have made a significant contribution to the commitment that we are being asked to do this morning to address our past failings and build the safer Church for the present and the future.

I am also grateful as Lead Bishop for Safeguarding for the trust which a number of survivors have placed in me. These conversations, whilst often very harrowing, have made me acutely aware of the need for the church to actively engage with and respond to survivors in a much better way than we have in the past.

Over the years, the Church and its leaders have singularly failed to see what was before our eyes. We did not give safeguarding the prominence it deserved. We failed to put preventative measures in place. We failed to listen to those who came forward with powerful accounts. We failed to fund safeguarding sufficiently at national or diocesan level. We failed to put in place proper accountability for safeguarding at the senior level of the Church.

Yet the signs that we needed to change were there. They were there in the work of other churches and in the secular world around us. They were there in the voices of survivors calling on us to address our failings.

It took the 2013 report of the Chichester Commissaries to galvanise the church into action, at least ten years after we should have done so. We know from the recently published report into the Past

Cases Review that whilst the Church did undertake a well-motivated review of some 40,000 clergy files in 2008-2009, that this failed to be delivered consistently.

Whilst there is much to do to improve safeguarding in the Church, I hope that Synod will nonetheless acknowledge the steps we have taken in recent years to improve our safeguarding practices. At national level, our spending on safeguarding has increased from £37k in 2013 - when we look back on that, a really derisory amount - to £1.6 million in 2018. Each diocese has also massively increased their resources for and with safeguarding. Indeed, in 2018 overall the Church will have spent some £7 million on safeguarding. Of course, change is never instant - in our meeting with survivors and their groups last night the Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged that - and money alone will never be enough. Real change requires a fundamental shift in attitude, behaviour and culture, especially where issues of deference or resistance to good safeguarding practice are identified. I am however confident that the resources and training that we are putting in place are now moving the whole Church forward.

As the legislative body of the Church, Synod has an important part to play in this. Not only are we responsible for passing legislation on safeguarding, but also, we must promote robust safeguarding practices in every aspect of Church life. At the February Synod I committed to bringing a motion for debate on safeguarding. The motion you have before you today invites you to commend the priorities for action set out in paper GS 2092. This paper comes to us from the National Safeguarding Steering Group (NSSG) in response to some of the emerging themes from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

The NSSG is a Committee of the House of Bishops which has delegated powers to agree safeguarding practice guidance on behalf of the House. The group includes 7 Bishops and members from the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners and the soon to be appointed Independent Chair of the National Safeguarding Panel will be part of the NSSG. It is the group which in our name is tasked with strategic oversight of work for safeguarding at a national level.

This paper is not a comprehensive action plan describing all the work on safeguarding which is happening at National or Diocesan level. There are safeguarding business plans which do that. Instead, the paper before us sets out some of the issues arising from the IICSA process so far and identifies those actions which are already in hand and those which require further work and further thinking and further action.

Synod needs to note that an interim report from IICSA will be published in the Autumn of this year. Its final report on the Anglican Church may not be available until 2020. Therefore, we may not know

for another 2 years what its final recommendations will be. However, we should not wait for these reports as we must continue to improve our work on safeguarding. When we see steps that we should take and improvements we could make, we must act. And knowing that some of these changes will take time we must act as quickly as we can.

The paper before you sets out safeguarding in the context of leadership, vision and culture. As the report says:

Our vision for a safer Church is based on our belief that this is what God intended the Church to be – a place of safety, refuge and healing and a place where people, including those who are suffering will find people who love them and care for them and do the right thing for them. Our vision must go beyond where we are now as a Church to where we want to be – a Church that society trusts to be a voice for the marginalised, a Church that is not afraid of hearing or speaking the truth and a Church that always stands up for truth and justice.

The paper identifies three thematic priorities which Synod is being asked to endorse this morning. All three priorities have a dual focus. They seek to improve the Church's engagement with and response to survivors, whilst also focusing on prevention. We must not lose sight of the need to prevent or minimise the risk of abuse occurring. This must also involve engaging children, young people and vulnerable groups in helping to build a safer Church.

The three priorities are: first - strengthening support for, and engagement with victims and survivors of abuse. Second: implementing more robust processes for clergy selection, suitability and discipline. And third: strengthening independence, oversight and scrutiny. Under each of these strategic priorities, specific tasks and actions are detailed in the paper. These include for example, the formation of survivor panels to support the work of the NSSG and NST and exploration into our approach to redress.

Some of you will have been aware that there have been calls for the Church's safeguarding processes to be made entirely independent, and whilst there may be changes about how safeguarding is structured and operates, I am clear that the Church must take responsibility for its own safeguarding. Safeguarding I argue, is integral to our mission and our ministry. Our Christian faith requires us to value all creation. Fundamentally, the church must ensure that everyone is kept safe and can flourish.

(I notice the light has turned to red)

I am grateful to the Business Committee for scheduling this debate and shall be listening very closely to what Synod members say. Safeguarding is at the very heart of the Church's mission. I therefore urging you to vote for this motion which stands before you in my name.

ENDS