**Safeguarding debate at General Synod Feb 2020**

Speech from Bishop of Huddersfield, Jonathan Gibbs,

“Chair, thank you.

I want to begin with some words of thanks.

Firstly, to Bishop Peter Hancock for all that he has done as Lead Bishop for Safeguarding over the last four years, and specifically today for his introduction to this debate.  We are, I know, profoundly grateful for his personal commitment to leadership in this vital work, and for bringing us to this point.

Secondly, to those members of Synod who proposed amendments to the main motion last week and for the way in which these focused everyone’s minds on where we must go from here.  Without going into all the details, we have had some very constructive conversations over the last week or so, and these led to the revised amendment which you have before you today.  The words are not the same, but the underlying intention is, and I am very grateful for the support of those members in bringing today’s amendment.

Thirdly, to the members of the survivor community who have spoken out so courageously and done all they can to hold us to account. We owe them a huge and continuing debt in so many ways.

So to the content of my amendment, which is proposed on behalf of the NSSG following our meeting last week, and which is intended to supplement as well as to endorse the terms of the original motion, all of which is important and needs to be said.

Clause (b) welcomes the fact that the NSSG “remains committed to ensuring that words of apology are followed by concrete actions” Synod, we all know that the season of apology and lament is by no means over, but now is also the time for action and for change.

Clause (c) begins to outline what that will look like, including crucially our developing “a more survivor-centred approach” to safeguarding.

That means hearing what survivors are saying and trying to see things through their eyes. It means recognising that the world looks and feels different to those of us who have suffered trauma and abuse, and it means working together with survivors to re-shape how we go about the shared life of the church.  And that is vital, because frankly too many of us too often still just don’t get it!

Clause (c) also speaks of “arrangements for redress for survivors”.  This is a small phrase but with big implications.  It will mean money, serious money, and we will need to work out how we are going to fund that.  But it must also mean changes in the way we handle claims and complaints, so that how we do things is shaped by the righteousness and compassion of God’s kingdom, and not by the short-term and short-sighted financial and reputational interests of the Church.

Finally, clause (d) looks to the future, and to the final IICSA report.  That report will not make comfortable reading (and nor should it) and we must be ready to respond promptly and fully to the report, as clause (d) requires.

But we need to do more than that, and we should be looking right now to go beyond whatever IICSA says, and to commit ourselves to making the Church of England into what it should be, namely a beacon of excellence in safeguarding, recognised as a community that excels in promoting the safety and well-being of every single human being, and one that acts as a voice for the voiceless and refuge for the vulnerable.

Synod, now is the time for action and for change, and I commend this amendment to you as an expression of our shared commitment.”