

Thank you, Chair. Synod, the most important voices that you will hear today are those of the survivors, Roz, Jane and Gilo, who spoke a few minutes ago during the presentation. I am enormously grateful to them for being willing to speak to us today, for challenging us and for being prepared to work with us to hold the Church to account and to enable us to see ourselves as others see us. Theirs are the voices we must seek above all to hear and to heed.

The motion before us today has three main elements:

- A full acceptance of the IICSA Report,
- A sincere apology to victims and survivors for the harm done by the church, and
- Endorsing and committing Synod to urgently implementing the six recommendations outlined in GS 2184

Let me begin with the six specific recommendations in the Report relating to the Church of England. These represent vital next steps on the journey, though in themselves they are by no means the end of the journey. Let me summarise them briefly:

1. Proposals for the structure of safeguarding in the Church of England. Here there are two main elements: Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers should become Diocesan Safeguarding Officers, to indicate their right to make independent decisions about safeguarding matters; and in turn they should be professionally supervised and quality assured (the word “managed” is also used) by the National Safeguarding Team.
2. Revising the Clergy Discipline Measure – here there are a number of proposals, with two headlines being dropping the twelve-month time limit on safeguarding related complaints and reintroducing the penalty of deposition from holy orders in the most serious cases.
3. There are two recommendations relating to information sharing with the Church in Wales and with statutory sector partners.
4. Most importantly, the Report recommends the introduction of a consistent national policy on support for victims and survivors. This needs to cover everything from our initial response at the time of disclosure and reporting, through to what should be included in a redress scheme, to which Synod committed itself in principle back in February. As Synod members are aware, an Interim Pilot Support Scheme has begun operating in the last few weeks, with the support of the Archbishops’ Council, and a project manager has just been appointed to begin work on scoping and designing the redress scheme.
5. Finally, continuing with external auditing, which the Church of England has begun to do in recent years with five yearly audits of Dioceses and Cathedrals.

Synod, I hope that none of these recommendations would be controversial for any of us and that you will wholeheartedly and unanimously support their adoption today.

Working backwards, the second clause in the motion states that Synod “sincerely apologises to victims and survivors for the harm done by the church.” Now let’s be quite clear, we do indeed owe that apology to victims and survivors, and that will continue to be the case in the future. BUT we have been issuing apologies like this for quite a long time, and we need to be *absolutely* clear that this alone is not enough, and may even be starting to wear rather thin. We need to understand that apologies in themselves are not sufficient and can actually become meaningless or worse *if they are not backed up with specific action*. Which brings me to the final element, which is contained in the first clause in the motion: “This Synod fully accepts the IICSA Report.”

Let’s think for a moment about what *full acceptance of the IICSA Report* actually means. It means hearing and taking to heart the profoundly shocking picture which the Report paints: of the failure of the Church to protect children and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse; of our failure to respond adequately when victims and others came forward to report abuse; and of the way in which church people’s responses were more shaped by a concern to protect perpetrators and the reputation of the Church, than to protect and support those who had suffered abuse.

It also means accepting that these failings cannot just be consigned to the past. In 2018 alone, 449 concerns about sexual abuse were reported, with over half involving church officers, ordained and lay. Yes, the Report acknowledges that a lot of progress has been made in recent years, with significant increased investment in safeguarding, greater awareness of the issues across the Church and much excellent work being done by safeguarding professionals and others at all levels. But the Report also makes it clear that as well as the specific recommendations that it makes, there is still much to be done to change the culture of the Church, especially around issues of deference and the exercise of power, as well as to ensure the provision of adequate resources to continue improving the Church’s safeguarding work and to respond with justice and compassion to victims and survivors.

Synod, “*full acceptance of the IICSA report*” means going beyond the six specific recommendations I have outlined already.

- It means taking seriously the kind of culture change that is still needed in the Church, so that abuse cannot be hidden and abusers cannot hide.
- It means accepting the cost, in terms of time and resources, of ensuring that safeguarding training really does transform people’s attitudes and perceptions, rather than just teaching them to jump through hoops.

- It means putting in place structures of oversight that help ensure operational decisions are made by professionals with appropriate expertise, independent of interference or pressure from elsewhere within the Church.
- Above all it means putting victims and survivors at the heart of our concerns, so that we work and journey with them to help them rebuild their lives – and that will come at a serious cost, and so it should, as we develop plans for supporting survivors and for redress.

Synod, there have been some real signs of encouragement recently, especially the Archbishops' Council's backing for the Interim Support Scheme, but I am concerned that there is still a risk that we will not rise to the challenge. There are so many other calls on the Church's time and attention and resources. There is still an in-built tendency for us to look to the interests of the institution rather than to heed the demands of justice and compassion. But the irony is that behaving like that would be *catastrophic* and in the end be far more costly for the Church than being bold and generous now.

Synod, I hope you will back this motion wholeheartedly and unanimously, but please do not let it stop there. I ask you to hold us to account in the years ahead. Hold the NST and the NSSG to account. Hold your Bishops to account, and your Bishop's Councils and DBFs. Hold the House of Bishops to account, and the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners. Hold us all to account, time and time again if necessary.

Today is another milestone in our journey, the journey towards greater justice for victims and survivors and towards a church that is safer and healthier for all God's children. We have begun that journey, but I am aware that there are and will be obstacles along the way – obstacles to do with finance, structures and the culture of the Church. Synod, please join with me in committing not only to the recommendations before us today, but to the kind of deep personal and institutional change that our Church so needs and that the kingdom of God demands. Thank you.

*(1257 words)*