

**GENERAL SYNOD****REVIEW OF ABUSE AT SOUL SURVIVOR****Summary**

1. This paper provides relevant information to enable Synod members to consider the Private Members Motion, as below, from the Revd Robert Thompson and should be read alongside GS 2361A.
  2. 'That this Synod, being deeply disquieted at the continued controversies over the actual independence of Safeguarding structures within the Church of England, does not accept that an internal Church inquiry into the allegations of abuse and cover-up within the Soul Survivor network is either sufficient or right in principle. It accordingly calls upon the Archbishops' Council to commission, on agreed terms of reference with survivors, a report into those allegations from an independent King's Counsel without delay.'
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**A note on core group processes**

3. Before looking at the specifics of the Mike Pilavachi (MP) case, it is helpful for Synod members to be reminded of the core group process. This is as follows:
  - a. A safeguarding allegation is made of abusive behaviour;
  - b. The statutory House of Bishops Managing Allegations Practice Guidance is followed which initiates a Core Group, which has oversight of the safeguarding investigation and risk management;
  - c. The purpose of the investigation is to assess risk, and to take steps to manage risk. It is not a disciplinary or judicial process. If required, that comes later;
  - d. If the investigation reveals information that meets the threshold for a statutory referral to the police, LADO or other statutory authorities, referrals are made; and the core group works alongside the statutory agencies.
  - e. The Core Group may recommend measures to manage any risk of further abuse; and,
  - f. If the Core Group discovers evidence of misconduct by clergy, that may lead to complaint being made against a cleric under the Clergy Discipline Measure. That is a judicial process involving the bishop, and in some cases a tribunal.

**The case of Mike Pilavachi****Background**

4. MP was a youth pastor at St Andrews, Chorleywood from where, in 1993, he 'planted' a new church called Soul Survivor Watford (SSW). SSW is an independent Anglican church based in former warehouse premises in Watford. MP is the founder, previous leader and was until recently an assistant pastor of the Soul Survivor Church.
5. Soul Survivor is perhaps best known for running annual summer festivals described as 'The Christian Glastonbury' (Times, 30/4/23). These events ran from 1993-2019 under a separate charity, Soul Survivor, were targeted at 12–18-year-olds and attended by up to 35,000 children, young people and adults each summer. Soul Survivor also ran several religious gap year courses and programmes for interns, known as Bodybuilders, Soul 61 and Soultime, drawing from young people internationally.

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6. MP was ordained in the Church of England in 2013. In 2014 Soul Survivor became a Bishop's Mission Order<sup>1</sup> (BMO) in the Diocese of St Albans. In 2016 MP was made an Honorary Canon of St Albans Cathedral.
7. MP does not currently hold a licence or permission to minister in the Church of England.

### The Safeguarding Concerns

8. The overall concern about MP may be described as one of spiritual abuse, a form of emotional and psychological abuse characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.
9. The safeguarding concerns spanned forty years and there was a recurring theme of emotional abuse by him drawing predominantly young males into Soul Survivor, who were then granted favour and opportunities at his behest. Many of these young males were vulnerable with a background of difficult paternal relationships.
10. Some were drawn into leadership positions and an 'inner circle' at Soul Survivor. Once 'in', MP often cast them 'out', ostracising them at his whim, sometimes for months on end, before eventually allowing them to return to the fold.

### The Safeguarding investigation

11. In September 2022, a safeguarding referral was made to the National Safeguarding Team. An internal Church of England safeguarding investigation was jointly conducted by the National Safeguarding Team and Diocese of St Albans, according to the House of Bishops' practice guidance (2017 Responding to, assessing, and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers).
12. The investigation examined the safeguarding concerns surrounding MP's behaviour and ministry and asked the question: is MP 'safe' clergy to minister today?
13. A Church of England Safeguarding Investigation is not about establishing guilt and is neither a HR nor disciplinary process. It is not intended to be judicial or punitive and is the internal risk management process for managing safeguarding allegations against church officers and clergy.

### Details of Investigation

14. The internal church safeguarding investigation was managed through the core group process chaired by a senior member of the NST. Members of the group included NST, Diocesan safeguarding team, senior clergy from St Albans diocese, a trustee of Soul Survivor Watford and representatives from statutory services.
15. Circa 150 people provided information to the NST and Diocese of St Albans during the safeguarding investigation and were confident in sharing their experiences. Support has been, and continues to be, available for those affected by this investigation.
16. MP engaged with the investigation and was interviewed several times.
17. During the exploration of the allegations relating to MP, wider safeguarding concerns came to light about the culture at Soul Survivor and the alleged failure by senior clergy,

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<sup>1</sup> A bishop endorses and authorises an initiative deemed likely to further the mission of the Church of England through developing a distinctive Christian community or a fresh expression of the Church.

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and others, to properly deal with known safeguarding concerns about MP, which were dealt with separately.

18. Whilst it is recognised that some in the wider Church community may have an appetite for more information relating to the safeguarding investigation and CDM complaint process relating to these matters, there are limits on what can be disclosed about confidential processes, and much of the information is covered by data protection laws. As such regular updates circulated via the CofE website and communication messages through the media have to be within the GDPR legislation.

### Statutory Referrals

19. Safeguarding concerns were reported to relevant statutory services throughout the internal church investigation in line with the practice and statutory legislation.

### Employment/suspension and Bishop's Licence to Minister

20. In September 2023 MP resigned from his role at Soul Survivor and resigned his licence to the Bishop of St Albans, and therefore cannot currently minister in the Church of England.
21. In January 2024 at the conclusion of the Safeguarding Investigation a press statement was made which clarified that MP currently had no authority to minister, and should he wish to return to any ministry in the Church of England this will be fully risk assessed.

### Clergy Discipline Measure

22. On the 4 September 2023 the NST was granted permission by the Deputy President of Tribunals to bring an allegation of misconduct against MP under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. This followed advice that the NST had received from independent counsel on the merits of commencing CDM proceedings.
23. The allegation for the CDM related only to the period after 2012, when MP was ordained in the Church of England and was therefore subject to the Clergy Discipline Measure. The CDM does not bear on actions by an individual before they are ordained. The CDM focused on a verbal interaction that MP was alleged to have had with a vulnerable person. A bishop from outside the Diocese of St Albans was appointed to consider the allegation and the response from MP. The result of the bishop's determination was that whilst no further action would be taken on the main allegation, MP's conduct had nevertheless fallen short of that expected of a priest in the Church of England, and in accordance with paragraph 163 of the Clergy Discipline Measure Code of Practice a written warning and advice was issued to him. In order that the decision be subject to independent judicial scrutiny, the NST requested that the President of Tribunals review the decision under section 13 of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. The Deputy President (an independent judge), having carried out a review, determined that the decisions to take no further action and issue a warning and advice were properly made.

### Charity Commission referral

24. The full concerns were referred to the Charity Commission who are now satisfied that necessary action has been taken and have closed their involvement.

### Outcome of the safeguarding investigation

25. The safeguarding investigation found the concerns relating to MP were substantiated and several recommendations were made by the core group relating to the ongoing management of risk.

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26. Where a concern is found substantiated against a member of clergy, the House of Bishops practice guidance dictates that the core group must recommend that the respondent undergo an independent risk assessment.

### Independent Review

27. A recommendation from the core group which had oversight of the internal safeguarding process was for the trustees of SSW to commission an independent review of MP's history with SSW.
28. An independent review is being conducted by Fiona Scolding KC of Landmark Chambers and is due to be completed circa July 2024.
29. This review is separate and independent of the internal safeguarding investigation and a report will be published at the conclusion.

### **Robert Thompson's private member's motion**

30. The motion from the Revd Robert Thompson is as follows:

*That this Synod, being deeply disquieted at the continued controversies over the actual independence of Safeguarding structures within the Church of England, does not accept that an internal Church inquiry into the allegations of abuse and cover-up within the Soul Survivor network is either sufficient or right in principle. It accordingly calls upon the Archbishops' Council to commission, on agreed terms of reference with survivors, a report into those allegations from an independent King's Counsel without delay.*

31. This motion was originally drafted over a year ago and as such does not reflect the progress and outcome of this safeguarding process. As noted above, both the work of the Core Group, and a subsequent process under the Clergy Discipline Measure, have been completed, in line with the relevant law and guidance. The original proposal for a report by an independent KC, in the terms originally proposed, is no longer relevant.
32. The motion is in any case proposing a deviation from the Church of England's agreed processes. Had there been, as suggested, a separate "independent report" led by a KC, that work would have been unable to address some of the fundamental issues i.e. the Risk Assessments under Canon Law.
33. There is no process in law for such an independent enquiry and therefore it would have no statutory force. As such there would be no ability to require MP or others to cooperate with such a report. This approach would have been contrary to the required processes approved by the General Synod and Parliament (outlined in paragraph 3).

### **Analysis of the core group process in relation to Mike Pilavachi and learning lessons**

34. Since the conclusion of the core group process in relation to MP most individuals involved appear to recognise that it has been effective in managing this allegation and any risk. The joint approach between the NST, the Diocese of St Albans Safeguarding

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Team and Trustees and Safeguarding representative from SSW was fundamental to an effective core group process that had victims and survivors at the heart of the process.

35. A safeguarding investigation has been undertaken and MP no longer has any form of authority to exercise ministry in the Church of England. It is recognised that there are limitations in relation to the CDM process, which cannot consider actions by an individual that are committed prior to their ordination. This may affect how victims and survivors view the outcome of these allegations. There are further limitations in relation to preventing individuals travelling abroad and seeking ministry across the Anglican communion and other denominations. In such circumstances, appropriate information is shared to minimise any identified and ongoing risk.
36. An important part of handling any safeguarding allegation is to reflect and learn from fundamental issues like; why and how these concerns happened and why these issues were not identified and challenged earlier, how we support victims and survivors; and how the process was conducted.
37. The Scolding review is an important part of this process and will be crucial to shape future policy and practice to ensure we continue to make the Church a safer place for everyone.

On receipt of the Scolding review the core group will consider how best to identify and learn lessons from the case as required in practice guidance.

**William Nye**  
**Secretary General**  
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