

How is the church to tackle safeguarding?

By Andrew Carey

When he was appointed Archbishop in 2010 Justin Welby could never have predicted that safeguarding would be such a key part of his episcopacy. And the Church of England had indeed lived a charmed life for far too long, not being buffeted by the same sorts of scandals which had consumed the Roman Catholic Church in a number of countries. But there were warning signs in the 1990s, that this charmed life would come to an end. There was a cluster of cases of paedophile priests emerging in the dysfunctional diocese of Chichester. It seemed that at least two of these priests had convictions for child abuse and yet were still ordained and continued to minister in the Church of England. And of course, it was in Chichester in the 1980s and 1990s, that Bishop Peter Ball was abusing young men and boys.

In 1992, Peter Ball the Bishop of Gloucester famed for his work with young men on his 'Give a year to God scheme' was found to have abused a young would-be novice monk called Neil Todd. The Church of England rallied around him, but then it became clear that there was substance to his claims and Peter Ball was disgraced, cautioned and resigned from office. In 1995 the famed Sheffield Nine O'Clock Service, an alternative worship experiment much publicised by the Church of England, was beset by accusations of sexual abuse and wrongdoing. The Rev Chris Brain who had a worldwide reputation for theological and ceremonial innovation, was found to have abused, manipulated and sexually 'enslaved' a number of young women. He was never charged for these abuses and disappeared from the Church of England and public life. It could be that the Nine O'Clock Service scandal will come back to haunt the Church of England in the near future. I would be surprised if victims of Chris Brain's abuse did not start to demand the sort of answers that victims of Peter Ball have – who knew what and when?

In the Noughties, there were half-hearted attempts to get some answers about the extent of abuse in the Church of England, including investigations in Chichester, and the Past Cases Review in 2008 and 2009 which was so badly handled that only a handful of cases of abuse were discovered hiding the true



Archbishop Justin Welby gives evidence to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales

The Bishops themselves are extremely demoralised by the church's systemic problems with safeguarding

picture. But it was the Jimmy Saville scandal which really gave an impetus to the uncovering of abuse in the Church.

In 2017 victims of John Smyth QC, came forward and the story emerged publicly, that was known to a closed circle privately, of a prolific abuser of boys in the conservative evangelical world. This famous barrister was perhaps the Church of England's most prolific abuser. Smyth used his influence at Iwerne Christian camps to groom boys and subsequently beat them. When found out, he committed the same abuses in Zimbabwe for many years.

And only in the last week, an independent review has reported on allegations made against the former evangelical leader of Emmanuel Wimbledon, Jonathan Fletcher. These allegations involve corporal punishment, nudity and bullying.

But it was the Jimmy Saville scandal which really gave an impetus to the uncovering of abuse in the Church.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was formed by the then Home Secretary Theresa May, and was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to investigate the Church of England.

Since then the Church of England has spent millions of pounds on IICSA-related activities, which has resulted in investigations into Peter Ball, the Diocese of Chichester and another major follow-up report into the Church of England. Archbishop

Welby appeared twice in front of IICSA, and two former Archbishops of Canterbury were also cross-examined in public. A story was told in public hearings of failures by the church authorities to act properly in the face of terrible abuses by some of its clergy. Some of these failures can be partly explained, if not always forgiven by victims, by different attitudes and standards of 'safeguarding' practice in the past, but contemporary mistakes and problems were also highlighted.

The final response of the Church of England to IICSA has now been published. In it the Church says that it will adopt all the recommendations of IICSA, including independent safeguarding, an effective disciplinary process, and better redress for victims.

On some levels that may be thought to be an end to the matter. For three decades now the Church of England has brought in new rules and laws to protect children and vulnerable adults. It has employed scores of safeguarding 'advisers' and now 'officers'. It has a professional National Safeguarding Team. It has training, policies and systems of redress. What more is there to do?

These are some of the issues which still face the Church of England:

Justice and false accusations

The George Bell fiasco highlighted the failure of church leaders to

understand basic principles of justice. The positively ancient nature of the allegations against the former Bishop of Chichester, a famed war-time church leader who had died nearly a half century earlier demanded special attention to the basic principle of justice – the Church of England had to do justice both to the woman making the allegation and the long deceased accused. The Church of England failed to understand that even a long dead man deserved the presumption of innocence and should be afforded a defence.

But this highlights a broader issue, that it is wrong to automatically 'believe the victim'. Justice is only served by listening to the complainant and then seeking to investigate those complaints without fear and favour. The Church of England is however not the kind of body that can investigate and this needs to be put in the hands of an independent body.

Core groups

The failure of core groups is at the heart of the complaints that those accused and those complaining have with the Church of England. These are secretive bodies which are self-selecting and which do not include representatives of those accused, and very often do not include representatives of those making complaints. I have seen at close hand, in advising my father Lord Carey, that they operate without listening, and ignore evidence they do not want to hear. The experience of the Dean of Christchurch Martyn Percy, demonstrates that they are

often established without a basic understanding of conflicts of interest and they very rarely benefit from specialised legal advice.

The House of Bishops

The Bishops themselves are extremely demoralised by the church's systemic problems with safeguarding. Many of them have been subject to CDM complaints on safeguarding grounds. There are a number of them who have been subjects of core groups. The Bishop of Lincoln was suspended for 18 months and at the end of this disciplined only with a rebuke. What kind of process is this?

Victims and complainants

In one of the worst cases I have come across, a man known as 'Victim N' has been driven to self-harm and suicide attempts. This man has been subjected to a campaign of harassment and bullying since he reported an indecent assault by a London clergyman. He has been a whistle blower to IICSA and a core participant, and has valuably highlighted the use by the Church of England of reputation-management companies in responding to safeguarding complaints. He has now lodged CDM complaints against Bishop Sarah Mullaly and the Rev William Campbell Taylor.

In forthcoming weeks, we will be publishing occasional articles taking up some of these themes and hearing from victims, and church leaders about how the Church of England can improve its handling of safeguardings.

In the wilderness
but not alone

Daily worship, weekly reflections and seasonal retreats
Online from Ash Wednesday to Easter Week

Launde Abbey

Retreat and Conference Centre
Leicestershire, LE7 9WF • 01572 717254
www.laundeabbey.org.uk/lent • info@launde.org.uk