

**To all holding the Bishop of Blackburn's Licence (Clergy and Readers) and Parish Safeguarding Officers**

Monday June 17<sup>th</sup> 2019

Dear Friends,

**The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse  
*Case Studies into the Diocese of Chichester  
and the response to allegations against Peter Ball***

*'Have mercy on us O God, for we have sinned.'* (Psalm 51,1)

It is very hard not to hear David's plaintive cry as we read the pages of the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse on the Diocese of Chichester and the Peter Ball case. What cries out most clearly is the desperate suffering of those who have been victims of sexual abuse by clergy and church leaders and the lifelong impact it has had on them.

We are writing to urge all of you to take the time to read the report which, whilst coming from a secular body, surely speaks to the church with something of a prophetic voice in the challenges it lays before us. And as you read, it is important to remember that, despite the title, this report is not about the past and nor is it about Chichester. It is about the whole Church and it is about today.

The Church is one body, so whilst we may not ourselves have been directly involved in the abuse of children and vulnerable adults, we are fellow members of the body with those who have and so we are all called to repentance. The Church should be the conscience of the nation and yet as the report shows, again and again we have placed the reputation of the institution above the needs of the vulnerable. In addition, when the contemporary church fails to respond properly to allegations from the past, this becomes a form of re-abuse, adding a fresh layer of hurt and harm to those whose lives are already damaged. Trite, formulaic apologies will not do. There has been grave sin within the Church, and unless corporately we name, confess and deal with that sin, our mission to the nation is fatally undermined.

Moreover the report indirectly challenges us to give even greater priority to ensuring that our local churches are places where children and vulnerable adults are entirely safe and where the voices of those who have difficult things to say or disclosures to make are heard and acted on.

Whilst the Church has undoubtedly taken great steps forward in this over the past ten years, it is absolutely critical that we ensure that safeguarding procedures in our parishes are robust, that training is up to date, that people who have concerns know how and where to report them and that the advice laid out in the Parish Safeguarding Manual is followed by every PCC.

Also vital is that, if you have any safeguarding concerns which are either current or historic, you come forward and report these.

But we need to understand also that safeguarding is not just about ticking boxes and following rules. It is about a much deeper awareness, especially for clergy and church-leaders, of where power lies in relationships and how easy it is to abuse that power. The report has a great deal to say about 'clericalism' and about an inappropriate culture of deference to clergy, especially senior clergy, which has resulted in cover-up and in the voices of the vulnerable being silenced.

The IICSA report also lays before us much deeper questions about the way we structure our life as the established church, ones that will need to be debated both within and without the Diocese.

- How can we ensure greater accountability of bishops and clergy, and do Common Tenure and the Clergy Discipline Measure need reforming to enable this?
- Is it best practice to have separate safeguarding functions in each Diocese or do we need a single, central safeguarding authority which is independent of Bishops and the DBF?
- Is a de-centralised structure (with independent parishes, dioceses and cathedrals) creating gaps between bodies that manipulative people can hide in?
- How can we ensure full implementation of safeguarding policies in the local church?

It seems to us that there are very few areas of our common life that we will not need to look at very closely and honestly in the years to come. Vague and evasive talk of 'culture change' is not enough because culture is driven and determined by structures, appointments and decisions.

The IICSA report is long and more will follow, but it seems to us to be vital reading for all who exercise leadership in the Church of England (it can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2WwSaPN> ). To spend proper time with the report is a powerful emotional experience and the overwhelming impressions we were left with were those of sorrow, guilt and deep sadness. We must keep in our prayers all who have suffered at the hands of those claiming to represent the Church. And we must promise to listen properly to those who have for too long felt silenced or who have been mistreated when coming forward.

The Christian writer and thinker Andrew Graystone is a man who has done a great deal of listening to survivors and who writes intelligently and challengingly on what he has heard. It might help to end this letter with some words from a recent reflection which both graphically illustrate the reality of clerical abuse and also challenge us to a response rooted in the saving work of Christ.

*“Victims of abuse in church contexts are baptised, not into the identity of Christ, but into a false baptism as a worthless object for the pleasure of the church. Many church leaders fail to understand this, and act as if, in their dealings with victims, they are simply being asked to make good the acts of a previous generation, for which they feel somewhat grudgingly responsible. In fact the role of church leaders is to robustly reverse the previous messages, and affirm the worth and identity of the broken victim as a true icon of Christ.”*

This comes, as ever, with our prayers.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt Revd Julian Henderson (Bishop of Blackburn)

The Rt Revd Philip North (Bishop of Burnley)

The Rt Revd Dr Jill Duff (Bishop of Lancaster)

The Very Revd Peter Howell-Jones (Dean of Blackburn)

The Ven Michael Everitt (Archdeacon of Lancaster)

The Ven Mark Ireland (Archdeacon of Blackburn)