

WEEKLY SERMON

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Bringing His light into the darkness

We all know that darkness exists in many ways in our world. In my role in the Diocese I often talk to people whose lives have been impacted by different types of abuse.

As Christians, we need to be able to actively listen with compassion and respond well to survivors who are brave enough to come forward and tell their harrowing stories of abuse.

We were reminded of this only very recently when Bishop Philip spoke to BBC Radio Lancashire in the wake of the recent powerful two-part BBC documentary: 'Exposed: The Church's Darkest Secret'.

The documentary was a stark reminder of the damage that can be done to people's lives when the Church does not listen and does not respond well.

As Bishop Philip said: *"There is no such thing as (what is often described as) 'historic abuse'. If you are a survivor ... even if the episode happened 20 or 30 years ago the trauma is still real; but if we don't listen to those voices, we are re-abusing."*

It is a fact that healing for survivors of abuse can only truly begin when we are not afraid to bring the shadows into the light and try to see through God's merciful eyes.

The House of Bishops wants to ensure that our churches and church-related activities are as safe as possible for children and vulnerable adults.

Because of this, all Dioceses – including Blackburn Diocese - have now been asked to undertake a review of the files of all clergy, church officers and employees who have currently (or have had in the past) substantial access to children and vulnerable adults.

This process has become known as Past Case Review 2 (or PCR2 for short) and will require much work in 2020.

With PCR2 we need to make sure that no stone is left unturned; if there are remaining shadows we need to make sure that they are exposed to the light.

Surely it is better to live in a Church that is humbled and purified than one that is afraid to expose the darkness; to learn from past mistakes and become a beacon of light?

You may remember what has become known as 'The Blackburn Letter', which was sent to parishes last summer? This was a reflection by our Bishops, Archdeacons and the Dean on the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

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In their letter they said: *“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.

“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.”

So, in the year ahead, how can you help to bring light, hope and vision to the darkness?

Parishes will shortly receive a letter from Bishop Julian outlining how they can engage with and support the work of PCR2.

There will also be information in our main communication channels – from The See magazine to our Parish Update ebulletin. In addition, there will be an area set aside on the Diocesan website with information, guidance and support for parishes.

Please also consider, as part of PCR2, how you can find ways to support victims to disclose what may be happening and to protect them ... as well as gaining the trust of survivors in order to help and support them.

This is not just the job of clergy and your PCC; we can all play our part. And remember – guidance is always available from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and their details – alongside links to other helpful information – can be found [on our Diocesan website](#).

May we all know his strength, wisdom and the searchlight of his Spirit in the year ahead. (Psalm 139:12)

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