

## Bishop of Truro: Statement on Safeguarding

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)*

We are very familiar with the second part of the verse above. But we do well to remember that Jesus' words about his own purpose set him in stark contrast to 'the thief', who 'comes only to steal and kill and destroy.' It is a very telling contrast – and hugely relevant to the issue of safeguarding.



One year on from being welcomed to the diocese as bishop, and in the light of recent events, I want to put down very clearly where I stand on the issue of safeguarding - and where we must all stand. What I write here has been reviewed both by our own Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Sarah Acraman, and, even more importantly, by a survivor of abuse, as a representative of that group of people whose views and feelings have so often been carelessly and cruelly overlooked.

As Jesus' words above make clear, abuse of any kind is not only incompatible with the good news of Jesus Christ, it is an outright denial of it. If the gospel is about the free, open and un-coerced entry of human beings into fullness of life in Christ, abuse is its direct opposite: its currency is secrecy and coercion and its consequence is the denial of life. It cannot, then, be tolerated in any form or to any degree. Safeguarding is not therefore a 'bolt-on' extra. If the gospel is about human flourishing, and abuse is a denial of that flourishing, then we can never say safeguarding is a side issue. It's core business for us.

As your bishop I have a particular charge laid upon me 'to serve and care for the flock of Christ', and as chief pastor of the whole diocese I will never abrogate that prime responsibility. I bring many years' experience of devising and implementing safeguarding policies to this role: but that very experience teaches me that in this area there is never any room at all for complacency.

Pastoral care in this diocese falls ultimately to me, so I expect all those who exercise pastoral responsibility under my authority to show the very highest levels of care and concern possible, the Lord being our helper. We do well to remember Jesus' sobering words, *'If any of you put a stumblingblock before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18: 6)*

These things should be of the utmost importance in any diocese, which is why the Church of England is currently undergoing the second 'Past Cases Review'. But there are particular reasons why these are core concerns for us here in Truro. I am acutely aware that Peter Ball lived with his twin brother, Bishop Michael, in the same house my wife and I now call home, after he resigned as Bishop of Gloucester. I know, too,

that for many the recent documentaries about Peter Ball were deeply upsetting and shocking – and rightly so.

Furthermore, those in authority in this diocese repeatedly failed to deal with allegations of child sex abuse made against a former press officer of the diocese, Jeremy Dowling. Those were abject failures and must never be repeated. The report on this case, written by Dr Andy Thompson, makes for sobering, but necessary reading, and I commend it to you:

<https://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/2018/05/49473/> and <https://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/11/JD-Review-Final-May-25-2018-DOT.pdf>

Some of you reading this will have been directly affected by recent publicity regarding abuse, with difficult and painful emotions stirred up once again. So let me remind you of the arrangements we have made in this diocese to help.

Anybody who would like to give information or make disclosures about church-related abuse is asked to email Sarah Acraman, on [Sarah.Acraman@truro.anglican.org.uk](mailto:Sarah.Acraman@truro.anglican.org.uk), or to call her on 01872 247351. An alternative is available for anybody who does not feel comfortable making contact this way. A dedicated helpline operated independently from the church by the NSPCC is available on 0800 802020. Anyone can use the helpline to provide information or to raise concerns regarding abuse within a Church of England context; whether they are reporting issues relating to children, adults or seeking to report poor safeguarding practice.

The organisation First Light has also been commissioned to provide a 'listening service'. To access this free service, please contact First Light on 0300 7777 4777, or email [saferfutures@firstlight.org.uk](mailto:saferfutures@firstlight.org.uk).

And of course it is my hope and prayer that all our parish churches be safe, secure and loving places where anyone who has been affected by what they have heard and seen can find comfort, support and hope.

We simply must not repeat the mistakes of the past. We must do so much better. Those we serve deserve nothing less than that. And the God we serve demands no less than that. The gospel we proclaim is good news of human flourishing, of fullness of life. Above all, I want us to be people of life and love, joy and hope, who are good news to the people and communities we are called to love and serve. So may we be intolerant of anything that makes us less than the good news our God calls us to be. For it is to him, ultimately, that we must answer.

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