



The Bishop of Chester

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An open letter to Steve Long

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Dear Steve

I am deeply grateful to you for accepting my invitation to serve as independent lead advising on our response to the Pearl Review into the activities of Victor Whitsey, formerly Bishop of this Diocese. I am writing to you personally, both as Bishop and as one of the three co-commissioners of your work.

I cannot begin to capture my revulsion, horror, and shame at what I read in the pages of this review. The behaviour endured by victims and survivors was evil and inhuman; realising that it was perpetrated by someone who claimed to have dedicated their life to the service of others and the Lordship of Christ corrodes the very fabric of the institution we have been called into. Along with my heartfelt prayers for survivors and all affected by this abuse, it seems that grief, humility, and deep re-learning are the only possible responses to this, for us, and for me personally.

Alongside this, though, I find both a gut-level determination and a considered rational commitment that we will do all that we can, that I will do all I can, to make Chester Diocese safe for everyone, especially the most vulnerable. In saying this, we know that we cannot stop perpetrators with an episcopal edict, but there is much we can do, many parts of which we have made a start on. We can develop culture and practice in which abusive behaviour is simply not tolerated. We can raise awareness to a level at which danger signs are recognised and action can be taken. We can train our clergy and lay officers in a manner which equips them to serve well in this arena.

We can make ourselves, I can make myself, accountable to others in a transparent manner which refuses to sweep hard situations under the carpet. We can stay in step with national protocols, and refuse the temptation of pride, quick defensiveness, or independence. We can take responsibility and own the inevitable mistakes we will make, and in naming the small errors arrive in a place where larger errors are far less likely. We have begun this and I am grateful for the hard work of many faithful people, but the work needs to continue and grow.

Steve, there is so much we can do, and this is where you come in. I refuse to build my own empire. Like everyone, I will be biased and ignorant in ways of which I am unaware and, left unacknowledged, this is dangerous for a Diocesan Bishop. I need you to help us do five things:

Firstly, I want to ensure we are listening to survivors and responding well to what they are saying. The past cannot be undone, but the wellbeing of survivors will remain a key concern for us. I am glad that we have established Safer Spaces, and that we are establishing a reparation scheme, but there may be other things we should be offering to those who would like it.

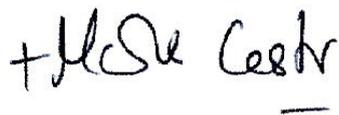
Secondly, please help us make sure we recognise where we are falling short systematically. Don't allow us to be blinded by the horror of particular incidents or shortcomings of certain individuals in a manner which leaves us blind to our shared shortcomings. In particular, whilst this request has been prompted by the Pearl Review, I would have been seeking this type of work as incoming bishop anyway. Please do not consider yourself limited to areas Judge Pearl has already highlighted.

Thirdly, please highlight what we have got right and need to build on. Don't allow us the comfort of believing that we are doing right because we are doing something, or to discard good practice where it can be used as a foundation for even better practice. Much good work has been done by many good people, and we don't want to step back from that where we don't need to as this would only set back the work we need to do.

Fourthly, please be specific and realistic about what we need to put in place. In saying this I recognise that there will be a number of ways to achieve what we need to achieve, but please don't pull your punches. I want advice on prioritising our resources, on training, on staffing levels, and on the place of safeguarding in our structures.

And finally, please link your advice into the national picture so that our practice is humble, transparent, and consistent. We need your advice to be in step with the NST, IICSA, and the Pearl review. The Diocese of Chester must (and will) take responsibility for Safeguarding locally, but we cannot forge our own independent path, and we are not always qualified to make a call between competing professional recommendations. It might be that your work raises questions that the national church needs to address, and I will support you if this is the case, but Chester needs demonstrably to be part of the National Church in this work.

Steve, I am so grateful for all that you will do, and assure you both of my support and of my utter availability to you in this process.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Mark Tanner" with a horizontal line underneath the name.

The Rt Revd Mark Tanner