THE LESSONS WE NEED TO LEARN

Victim's voices.

A strong grasp of what a child-centred approach means and to take what children and young people say seriously

Structures which work effectively

Sound policies on safeguarding are not sufficient. They need to be supported by active awareness, robust implementation and a structure that is fit-for-purpose

The need for external expertise

It is possible to lose clarity or make errors of judgement when working with personable and charismatic individuals, who use their inter-personal skills to shield devious and predatory behaviours. If there are any concerns, then introducing a more distanced perspective can be helpful in seeing things more clearly.

Resourcing safeguarding.

The very high reputation risk that the church runs needs to be carefully considered if it fails to invest in structures and resources in Child Protection.

The importance of recording and the keeping/storage of records.

Good record keeping is crucial. Accurate, clear and well organised records can assist in identifying patterns of behaviour; ensuring accountability and avoiding confusion.

A lack of understanding of safeguarding issues = high risk

- **lack of understanding of confidentiality and issues regarding the sharing of information**:
  While confidentiality is important, secrecy enables abuse to thrive. The responsibility cannot be held by one individual. At times the need for inappropriate confidentiality outweighs the need to protect children. Information must be shared well and appropriately, and expertise used.

- **lack of recognition of the need for 'respectful uncertainty' in exploring concerns. It is very easy to minimise behaviour that should be of concern**.
  This can be attributed to the offender's' nationality, personality or work style. 'It's just how he is'.

- **failure to recognise the importance of joining up smaller pieces of information.**
  Collected over time, knowledge and information achieves an overarching picture (the 'safeguarding jigsaw').

- **difficulty in believing that child sexual abuse could be occurring**.
  The church and its members, at times, have difficulty accepting that such abuse happens, a lack of acceptance, such denial can be reinforced by the church's culture and theological mindset.

- **failure to recognise the possibility of 'grooming' behaviours**.
  Families and adults in positions of authority may be groomed as well as children or vulnerable adults.

An over-reliance on the state (police, local authority children and young people's services) whose assessment of the situation might be flawed. There is a need for the church to work with and in those structures but also to have a professionally competent view on safeguarding within the church.

A lack of recognition of the emotional impact of the issues/events on a variety of people involved. There can be a lack of appreciation of the impact of abuse on the direct victims, the church community and the reputation of the wider church.

The culture of the church. Safeguarding needs to be discussed and understood theologically. Some aspects of church culture do not work towards promoting awareness and ensuring the safer practices and procedures which can help guard against abuse. Repentance, forgiveness, acceptance and a focus on looking to the good in people requires balancing with wariness, insight, and discernment about inappropriate behaviour. This balance is difficult to achieve and the church needs to work on its understanding of gospel imperatives so as to embrace the tension. Without such attention being given the church is seriously at risk of failing to recognise paedophile grooming or being able to respond appropriately when concerns are recognised.

Leadership in relation to safeguarding. Safeguarding must be a fundamental aspect of the ministerial (leadership) role within the church.

The importance of safeguarding training. This cannot be overstated, learning must be demonstrated.

Safer recruitment and safe working practice. There are risks in taking short cuts to speed up recruitment or move things forward. Safe working is not guaranteed in a situation where job descriptions are not always adhered to and people are encouraged to develop their interests and enthusiasms without proper clarity. There are risks in allowing drift in job descriptions because of an individual's ability and gifts without this being carefully planned, recorded, supervised and monitored.

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