

## **Diocesan Synod – Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November**

Today I will be speaking about the Makin review. As always, when discussing safeguarding, you must feel free to withdraw at any time or speak to someone. Take good care of yourself.

Over the last few years, we've had a series of reviews highlighting our institutional failings in safeguarding – people in senior leadership in the Church who have caused enormous harm to many people – and at times our response as a Church has been woefully inadequate. Yet, despite the previous reports, the Makin Review was still shocking. The number of victims, the type of abuse, the failure of church officers to respond – all of it is truly shocking. Our hearts go out to the survivors – some of whom have battled for years to be heard.

Each of you will have your own reactions and, in a moment, there will be an opportunity to talk together in small groups and, if you want to, share your feelings. For me, the last few days have been a time of deep introspection. My own record in safeguarding is far from perfect – I've made mistakes. I've tried to do the right thing, but sometimes I've ended up making matters worse rather than better. And of course, the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury doesn't, of itself, make things better for survivors. It's what we do now, in response to all of this, which will determine whether survivors can, in any sense at all, experience a measure of healing. And I'm referring here not just to the survivors of John Smyth's abuse, but all those who have experienced abuse in a church context – some of whom have contacted us in recent days to say how they have been re-traumatised by these latest events.

My own recent interaction with survivors (not related to Makin) has made it clear to me that every survivor is different, everyone wants something different, everyone needs something different, and the only way to help is to spend time, often lots of time, in careful listening and thoughtful exploration of their own individual and personal needs.

This is why I am so grateful that we have such a good safeguarding team in the diocese who give huge amounts of time to working with survivors – listening, caring, advising – and holding me and other diocesan leaders to account for our response.

It's also why I am grateful for the Safe Spaces support services for survivors – free of charge, independent from the Church of England, and available to anyone – and for the national redress scheme which is being set up – it's taken far too long to get it established but it will soon be available to all survivors. I hope you will play your part in advertising these schemes and ensuring they are well known and understood.

And I am also deeply grateful to our Parish Safeguarding Officers – hundreds of people across the diocese who give their time voluntarily to work proactively to make our churches safe.

So, I hope that, in the light of all that has happened this last week, we will no longer have anyone questioning the need for safeguarding training – whether clergy, lay minister or PCC member. It's so important that we don't see this as a tick box exercise, or another diocesan or national initiative which is being imposed on local churches. This is core to all we are and do – I don't know how else to say it, to impress on every single person in every church, chaplaincy, fresh expression of church – this is everyone's responsibility. I don't care if you don't have any children in your church – you still need to be aware of your responsibilities in safeguarding. I don't care if you've done a lot of training in your professional life, you still need to know about safeguarding in a church context.

Finally, let me say that in our opening worship in a few minutes, I will be commissioning Sophie Holder as our Diocesan Director of Racial Justice. I'm delighted that she is joining us to champion this vital work. Racial justice is not the same as safeguarding but there is a link. Our Christian understanding of every person being created in the image and likeness of God lies at the heart of safeguarding and racial justice. To treat another person as somehow less than this, or as existing simply for our own pleasure, or not worthy of respect is evil, pure and simple.

And similarly, when we come to the item on our agenda about Living in Love and Faith, this too is not the same as safeguarding, but it is linked. Whatever our theology or view of marriage and relationships, we are all called to love our neighbour and respect them as someone loved by and precious to God.

I'm speaking to you frankly brothers and sisters. We are being humbled as a church, and I suspect there is yet more humbling to come. We have so much to learn. But we should not be disheartened. God is not done with us yet. There is forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Spirit is given to transform us. So let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith – we place our trust in him, not in any human institution.

+Martyn Leicester