

Sat 7 December, 2024

Chair, Members of Synod,

Today, I bring before you a motion that reads:

"This Synod resolves to pass a vote of no confidence in the Archbishops' Council's oversight of safeguarding and urges for the necessary reforms to restore trust, safeguard the vulnerable, and uphold the Church's moral and legal responsibilities."

This motion comes at a critical moment, following the publication of the Independent Learning Lessons John Smyth QC – known as the Makin Review. While this report does not directly criticise the Archbishops' Council, it highlights systemic issues within the Church of England and underscores the urgent need for reform.

The Makin Review is only the latest in a series of reports that reveal profound failings in safeguarding across the Church. Among these are:

The Elliott Review from 2020, which identified inadequate leadership, fragmented safeguarding practices, and a defensive culture that prioritised institutional reputation over survivors' welfare. The Archbishops' Council was specifically criticised for failing to ensure consistent safeguarding systems across dioceses and for maintaining structures that eroded trust in safeguarding processes.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, ICOSA, published their report into the Church in 2020, which found that the Archbishops' Council had failed to provide clear leadership or accountability. It noted inconsistencies in safeguarding policies, a lack of survivor engagement, and systemic resistance to necessary cultural and organisational changes.

The Jay Report published earlier this year, described the Church's safeguarding structures as fundamentally flawed and overly influenced by diocesan bishops. It recommended creating independent charities to oversee safeguarding delivery and scrutiny, entirely outside the Church's governance.

Each of these reports presents a stark picture of systemic failings, including issues of governance, accountability, and the prioritisation of institutional reputation over the needs of the vulnerable.

As a Synod, we face a stark choice: to reject the findings of these reports or to accept them. If we accept them, we must also acknowledge our moral responsibility to act. Silence or inaction would only perpetuate the very culture that these reports criticise.

This motion does not call for resignations, nor does it prescribe specific solutions—those are not our roles as a Synod. Instead, it is a clear and humble statement that, based on the evidence before us, we have no confidence in the Archbishops' Council's oversight of safeguarding. Furthermore, we ask the Council to take the urgent and necessary actions required to rebuild trust, safeguard the vulnerable, and restore the Church's moral and legal integrity.

It is important to note that these issues are not confined to the Archbishops' Council. They reflect a wider failure of leadership—lay and ordained—throughout our Church. Yet, as the primary executive body tasked with leading and overseeing safeguarding, the Archbishops' Council has a particular responsibility to set the example and address these failings.

Passing this motion is not an attack but an opportunity. It allows us, as a Diocese, to affirm our commitment to safeguarding and to call for the deep reforms necessary to create a safer Church for all. It is a moment to speak into the void and to ensure that our Church's future is one of justice, transparency, and care.

As children of God, we cannot stay silent. I urge you to support this motion as an essential step in the long journey towards rebuilding trust and safeguarding the vulnerable.

Thank you.

Rev Nathan Ward

Vicar of St Margaret's Church, Rainham