

Review of Church of England historic cases of abuse



The latest review by the Church of England into historic cases of abuse (Past Cases Review 2) has brought to light again how inept human institutions can be when looking after the frail and vulnerable. So often the expectation that those in authority will conduct themselves appropriately and implement good practices effectively has resulted in catastrophic trauma and disappointment. Shockingly, institutions which have promoted themselves as bastions of sanctuary for those in need have sometimes found individuals within their own ranks using such cover to create opportunities to manipulate and exploit their victims. Similarly, those charged with maintaining discipline and holding boundaries have often colluded with harmful and damaging behaviour rather than face the consequences of ‘rocking the boat.’

Having worked for many years in adult psychotherapy and having run a diocesan counselling service for clergy and their families, I’m all too aware of the psychological damage that results from abuse. Such trauma crushes the human spirit, arrests development, and destroys life chances, trapping many children, women, and men in a ceaseless pattern, consciously and unconsciously, of victimisation. Clergy and others who have perpetrated such

abuse over the years have caused untold damage to the reputation of the Church, tarnished the reputation of the profession of 'Vicar' and made the task of pastoral ministry so much harder on the street and in our parishes. I too feel anger and dismay at colleagues who have failed miserably to uphold the standards of behaviour expected of them.

Suspicion and a lack of respect for the Church will linger in the hearts and minds of many for years to come. No amount of apology from Archbishops and Bishops will take away the dark stain of what has happened. Thankfully, 'Safeguarding' is now well and truly part of a healthier culture within our local churches. In the past, there was an understanding that the Church was there for everyone and that anyone could become part of the 'church family' without question. That is no longer the case. Anyone now whose behaviour is a cause for concern is rightly challenged and if necessary is prohibited from taking part in church life. Priority is given to those who are vulnerable, and policies are strictly adhered to in order to ensure that a culture of flourishing is engendered.

Walking away from a past that has been so damaging in so many ways will take time. For those who have been directly affected the shadow of trauma is never far away – the path from victim to survivor is long and painful. For those of us working in ministry, the cost of the damage and its aftermath is high. But I believe we will turn this corner. Light will triumph over the darkness and what is good and true will be restored.

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey