

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse; an open letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the lead safeguarding bishop and the national director of safeguarding.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, IICSA, will publish its overarching investigation report into the Church of England (and Church in Wales) on Tuesday (6th October).

For survivors, this will remind them of the abuse they suffered and of our failure to respond well; it will be a very harrowing time for them. Some have shared courageously their story at the IICSA hearings or in other forums. For others this report will be a reminder of the abuse they have never talked openly about. We are truly sorry for the shameful way the Church has acted and we state our commitment to listen, to learn and to act in response to the report's findings. We cannot and will not make excuses and can again offer our sincere and heartfelt apologies to those who have been abused, and to their families, friends and colleagues.

We, as the Church of England, are ready to support anyone who comes forward. We must honour our commitment to change. Survivors have told us that words without actions are meaningless; we are taking action but we are also aware that what we have done has neither been soon enough nor sufficient.

Please pray for all those who will be affected by the publication of the report on Tuesday and that as a Church we are able to respond with humility and a shared determination to change. We must listen carefully and reflect honestly on all that the report says and continue to drive change towards a safe Church for all.

At this point, we know that the report is based on the main public hearing in July 2019, which examined the response of the Church of England and Church in Wales to allegations of child sexual abuse, as well as the adequacy of current safeguarding policies and practices. The report will also focus on common themes and issues identified by the overall investigation which included the case studies into Bishop Peter Ball and the Diocese of Chichester, both held in 2018. The report will identify failings that we are already working to change, and failings that we will need to work harder to change. There will no doubt be strong recommendations and we welcome that. We make an absolute commitment to taking action to make the Church a safe place for everyone, as well as to respond to the needs of survivors for support and redress.

Safeguarding is valuing every person as one who is made in God's image. It is the prevention of harm, and the promotion of well-being. It is about responding compassionately to victims and survivors, addressing issues of justice with regard to survivors, other complainants, respondents and all others affected and helping them to rebuild their lives. Safeguarding is fundamental to our faith. Whatever part we play in the life of the Church, safeguarding is the responsibility of each one of us, guided and advised by our safeguarding professionals. Church leaders

have a particular responsibility to work together to bring about the change in culture and practice that we need to see and has simply been too slow.

Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby

Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell

Lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs

National Director of Safeguarding, Melissa Caslake

If you or anyone you are in contact with are affected by the publication of this report and want to talk to someone independently please call the Safe Spaces helpline on **0300 303 1056** or email: safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk. There are also other support services available.

Alternatively feel free to contact the diocesan safeguarding team in your area.

3 min read

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