

Presentation to General Synod from Alexander Kubeyinje, national director of safeguarding

Many of you will have seen my [report to General Synod](#) on my observations from being national director of safeguarding for almost six months.

I would like to start by apologising and clearing up any misunderstanding or confusion.

My report refers to issues around safety, relationships and miscommunication. I want to say that my intention was not to upset or cause harm by the comments I made in the report, and I have been in contact with lots of people and apologised since then. My intention was to highlight an issue.

I would like to go on the record by saying there are many victims, survivors and advocates who have campaigned tirelessly and have worked with the Church to change safeguarding; without their input and dedication the changes we have seen in safeguarding would not have been possible - for this they must be commended.

The Church has failed in its safeguarding responsibilities, leaving many people feeling a sense of betrayal, loss, trauma and injustice. I have had the opportunity to meet with many survivors, victims, advocates on several occasions and will continue to do so as I made a promise to victims and survivors in November last year within the first open forum we held. Hearing their stories and experiences was saddening. I did however leave with a sense of hope that they truly wanted to help the Church to change and that we could work in partnership to achieve our common goals.

For this I am grateful and want to say thank you to all individual victims and survivors as well as all survivor groups and organisations who are engaging with us on this path to improvement.

We would also like to hear from young people and families and understand their current experiences of feeling safe within the church.

As a social worker who has worked in child protection for many years and have had to make many life-changing decisions, I understand the trauma these decisions may have on children and their families. Trauma can manifest itself in many ways and as a Church we have a responsibility to survivors and victims, as caring for vulnerable people is at the heart of the Christian message.

I know this personally from my own involvement in the local church – and from a number of years of being on the PCC.

The Church also has a responsibility to protect staff in order for them to continue to offer support to survivors and victims.

As the national director the point I was trying to make was that I believe the Church needs to be safer for all and we all need to find a way to address and prevent issues that cause harm to people.

As a Church we do have the best intentions with regards to putting things in place, however we do not always take into consideration the complexity and length of time it may take to implement. These delays will understandably cause frustration to victims and survivors, this needs to be handled with care and compassion.

My plea today to everyone is that we need to find a better way to build relationships and improve our communication.

Otherwise, this trauma cycle will continue and cause further damage to all involved.

Using a Trauma informed Restorative practice approach may be beneficial if we follow the following set of principles

- Empowerment
- Honesty and Transparency
- Respect
- Engagement
- Healing
- Personal accountability
- Inclusiveness
- Collaboration
- Problem solving

Everyone should be treated with empathy, compassion and respect at all times.

I have seen a lot of good work within the Church and safeguarding is improving however we have to remember this work did start from a low base, in the last few years we have started to see the fruits of this work.

It must be noted that we still have a lot more work to do and we want more victims and survivors to join us to help shape the changes that are very much needed to make the Church a safer place for all.

We are certainly not there yet and still have some way to go, this is why it is imperative that we get the independent scrutiny right to assist in raising safeguarding practice and policies. This sense of scrutiny will also give confidence that, as we were criticised for at IICSA 'we are not marking our own homework'.

There has been some discussion on the issue of independence in safeguarding in the past week and I would like to underline the point I made in my paper.

The Church has a vision that safeguarding should have independent scrutiny which is a good concept and one that I endorse if done properly will help to raise the standards in safeguarding. That is very much wanted and can also highlight areas of strengths that can be built on.

Policies and processes are not always clear and there is a need for a better understanding of roles and responsibilities through training for instance and better communication. As a National Safeguarding Team we are working on this with our diocesan colleagues.

As you can see in the NST update report there are a number of work streams that highlight the ongoing work. I know Bishop Jonathan will touch on this later however I would be willing to answer any questions you may have on the safeguarding programme if seen as helpful.

Synod I look forward to working with you as our safeguarding work develops, always remembering that the voice of survivors and victims is core to what we do.

Presentation from lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs

As you may be aware, I will shortly be stepping down as Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, and I hope you will allow me a few moments to reflect on my three years in this role, as well as to address the issues covered in the NST reports before you. I would also like to begin by thanking Alex Kubeyinje for his presentation and answer to questions and to express my support for him and the work he is doing – more about that in a few moments.

I accepted this role because I felt a deep sense of call to play my part in strengthening the Church's safeguarding work, and especially our response to victims and survivors. That sense of call arose out of my own experience of coming to terms with childhood trauma and of working with vulnerable families as Chair of the family support charity Home Start in Wirral.

I came into post a few months before the publication of [IICSA's report into the Anglican Church](#), published in October 2020, and that report has set much of the agenda for our work over the following years. The Report – and the Inquiry leading up to it – was a powerful reminder of the Church's failures, especially in our response to victims and survivors, and the workstreams outlined in the [NST Update](#) give details of how we are seeking to address the recommendations of the IICSA report.

The first section of GS2293 outlines the Safeguarding Programme which comprises five key elements of our response to IICSA. They relate to: the [National Redress Scheme](#), the change from DSA to DSO and the introduction of professional supervision and quality assurance of Diocesan Safeguarding Teams, Information Sharing with other partner organisations, a National Safeguarding Casework Management System and a

second Past Cases Review scheme.

Other items in the update refer to the Interim Support Scheme, the Learning and Development programme, the Safeguarding Code of Practice Measure, and our initial response to IICSA's final report on religious institutions, along with engagement with survivors, the Safe Spaces service and Learning Lessons Reviews.

Synod, I think you will agree that all this constitutes a huge programme of work, and I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who is working so hard to deliver this programme, including staff colleagues in the NST and dioceses, as well as countless clergy and lay people up and down the country – and most importantly those victims and survivors who have helped to shape this work and who continue in various ways to challenge us to do things better.

Most of this work of course goes on behind the scenes and below the radar. What we hear about most often (quite understandably) are the things that go wrong or where someone is not satisfied with what the Church has done or with our response to them. Now it goes without saying that we have to be committed to resolving these issues as far and as quickly as we can for the sake of all concerned. That is in everyone's interests.

But one of the things I would like to reflect on for a moment is why this sometimes proves so difficult, particularly for the Church, and I believe this is precisely because we are the Church of Jesus Christ.

The essence of the Church is that we are meant to be a sacred space that is safe for all. When that goes wrong – especially when people do awful things to children and vulnerable people – then there is a deep sense of betrayal as well as of pain and trauma. There is a breach of trust which it is very hard and sometimes impossible to repair – and that explains in part why even what we do to try to address what has happened can itself be met with suspicion and even hostility. I think what Alex has been seeking to do is to highlight and name that context, not to blame individuals, and that context is something we all need to reflect on.

Of course when you look at how the Church has often responded to victims and survivors, as reported for instance by IICSA and other reviews, then that sense of suspicion and hostility is hardly surprising! But that doesn't mean we should not go on trying to do things better and to get things right in the future.

We are currently living through the aftershocks of IICSA and other harrowing reports into abuse perpetrated within the Church and our failure to respond as we should have done. And our response to this situation has to be many-sided. It has to include redress and support for victims and survivors, including but not limited to financial compensation through the Redress Scheme which is under development.

Now Synod, it is a matter of deep regret to me that this is taking far longer than I had hoped and anticipated when I spoke about it in this chamber three years ago. I now understand much more about the complexity of what is involved and I believe that all those working on this are doing everything they can to get this done and get it right. But I would also urge Synod to keep pushing to bring the Scheme into operation as soon as possible – even if that means that some of the elements, such as how exactly the principle of subsidiarity is enacted, may have to come later.

At the same time, as we all know, there remain challenges around how the Church can best ensure effective external scrutiny of its safeguarding work. The Archbishops' Council set up the Independent Safeguarding Board, ISB, to begin this work and to help us to think through what would be required in the longer term. As you will be aware, we are currently seeking to address some issues about which it would not be appropriate to say more at this stage, but we look forward to working with the ISB to find a way forward as soon as possible.

Having said that, and acknowledging the difficulties, I would encourage Synod not to lose sight of the crucial work that is outlined in the Report that you have in front of you. This represents a sea-change in the Church's safeguarding work over the last few years, and it is mirrored in the fantastic work being done in our dioceses, cathedrals, parishes and other church setting up and down the country. I want to record my thanks to everyone who is working so hard to make our churches safe, healthy and nurturing places for all.

In closing, I would just like to say two more things very briefly. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that the changes we have made over the last few years have undoubtedly placed greater expectations on clergy and parishes, at a time when we are all facing the impact of the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis. We understand that and the National Safeguarding Team, NST and National Safeguarding Steering Group, NSSG are committed to working with you to help address your concerns.

Finally, I want to end with a plea for us to keep working together in the Church of England towards creating an ever healthier and safer culture for all. Understanding the impact of abuse and trauma, learning from victims and survivors, seeking to find ways of responding with greater insight and care, honouring and protecting one another, and recognising that for all our failings we are committed to enabling our churches to embody the justice, compassion, mercy and grace of the kingdom of God.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of undertaking this role over the last three years. Please give your support to my successor and to all my colleagues in the years to come. I am pleased to commend to you this update from the National Safeguarding Team.

Synod voted to take note of this report.

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