



9 January 2020

Dearlly Beloved in Christ,

To all Incumbents and Priests in Charge in the Diocese of York

I hope this letter finds you well and that you are refreshed and ready for this New Year and full of expectation that God will reveal himself to us once again this Epiphanytide.

Thank you for all that you do to make our churches a safe place for people to worship. As you may be aware the Church of England has committed itself to the review of all past cases of potential abuse or harm toward children, young people and vulnerable adults. This is known as the Past Case Review. This letter contains information about the Past Case Review process and a request for action by you under House of Bishops Practice Guidance, which should therefore be considered mandatory.

Please take a moment to read the message below from the Right Reverend Mark Sowerby. Bishop Mark is the deputy lead Bishop for safeguarding and is also the Past Case Review Project Board Chair.

The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. [John 1.5]

St John the Evangelist, like St Luke and St Paul, uses the imagery of light and darkness, where darkness represents concealment and shame, whereas light represents the revelation of truth. Darkness hides things that are forgotten, uncomfortable or broken and have been 'put out of the way' in cellars or behind closed doors. They may be things that are inconvenient or of which we are ashamed or afraid. In darkness they lie where we can forget about them, but Christ is The Light of The World and brings to light things now hidden in darkness. He brings to light those deeds that have been concealed and the victims of sins who have been silenced or kept from view. The Light

shines for those who need justice and healing and upon those misdeeds that have injured them.

Allowing light to shine on what has been hidden is a first step towards healing, not only for those who have been abused, but for those whose consciences are, or ought to be, troubled by those sins they have buried away beyond the sight of others. Sometimes it will take an external prompting for those things to be opened to the light of day and to the light of Christ but with such prompting may begin the path to penitence and forgiveness, the path to healing of long-hidden wounds.

Through the Past Cases Review, we are asking you to help shine a revealing light on any instances of abuse that have occurred in your benefice and to help ensure that everything that ought to be brought into the light has been. Shining a light on what has hurt or frightened someone is a matter of justice for those who have been victims; sometimes it may also prevent further harm and sometimes it may be the first step towards healing. With that in mind, we thank you for your cooperation in working towards a safer Church. +Mark

The House of Bishops wishes to ensure that our churches and church related activities are as safe as possible for children and vulnerable adults. It is therefore important that all known cases of concern about the behaviour of clergy and church officers towards children and vulnerable adults have been considered and dealt with appropriately.

Incumbents, with the support of their Parish Safeguarding Representatives, are asked to check that all known instances within their parish(es) both historically and currently have been notified to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, and any which have not are reported immediately.

This is obviously a sensitive task which may require you to look at parish files and make some discreet enquiries. Where, *prima facie* there is a past concern, details of which are not known, it may be appropriate to consult a previous incumbent (where possible). In the spirit of the Gospel we all want to protect and care for our children and vulnerable adults and at a time when the Church's safeguarding policies and practices are under close scrutiny as incumbents you will recognise the importance of being as sure as possible that all known instances of concern have been addressed.

Information is being sought on persons who have or have had a role in the Church where their role brings them into contact with children or with adults at risk of abuse. Information is **not** being requested on **worshippers** and those attending church activities who do not hold a role in the Church. You do not need to provide details of people subject to safeguarding agreements. Protective measures should have been installed in such cases. The advice of the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser should be sought in any instances of doubt.

You should also include in your consideration employees and volunteers who operate under any authority of the PCC, this includes charities and not for profit organisations established by the PCC to enable the provision of services in the community. Advice on whether a particular circumstance should be reported may be obtained from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Experience has shown that there have been some cases of alleged abuse to people over 16 who have later said that they consented. Any such cases should be included even though prosecution or cautioning has not taken place.

It is recognised that this is a difficult task. Incumbents are being asked to ensure that everything that is relevant and currently known has been passed to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor and that further information which may emerge in future is promptly notified to them.

Enclosed is a template for submission of your return. This should be completed and returned even if you have nothing to report confirming it as a Nil return. The final date for submission is the **28th February 2020**.

Where a parish (or parishes) does not have an Incumbent, the task for completion of this submission will rest with the Church Warden. Support is available for completion of this task from your Area Dean.

With every blessing,

†Sentamu Ebor: