

In helping others, we are always inspired by the example and words of Christ.

In the Gospel of St Matthew, within an image of the last judgement, Christ reminds us that as far as kindness or neglect are concerned “as you did this (or did not do this) to one of the least of these, you did it (or did not do it) to me.”

(Matthew 26: 31 – 45)



Although we know that safeguarding should be as much about creating safe environments as it is about responding to abuse, it is the aftermath of the discovery of abuse perpetrated by people within the Catholic family which has cast the longest shadow over our work in the Church. And for people who have experienced abuse, although the shadow may sometimes become weaker, it will probably never disappear.

The current Safeguarding arrangements, which have included the establishment of a national Catholic Safeguarding office and the systematic development of policies and procedures had their origins in the aftermath of the child abuse scandals brought to light in recent years. The Catholic Church is one of many institutions which have been rocked by such scandals. The Catholic Church has taken many steps on a long journey towards trying to put things right. We know that we have not always got things right. And we know that sometimes we have got things very wrong.

In Hallam, Bishop John Rawsthorne made a public commitment to recognising the pain and suffering of those who had experienced hurt and abuse whilst holding out a hope for healing and change with the first national Service of Sorrow and Reconciliation held in St Marie’s cathedral in February 2010. That event specifically honoured the work and courage of Irish survivors. At the same time a Diocesan appeal was launched to find experts - people with either professional or personal experience and an understanding of the impact of abuse - to advise the Diocese. This led to the establishment of an advisory group which assisted with training and awareness raising and helped the Hallam Catholic Safeguarding Commission to recognise that care and support for people who have been hurt is and must always be integral to the Church’s mission.

In September 2010 some members of that group met privately with Pope Benedict. By the time of that meeting, he had spoken vigorously of the need to reach out to victims and survivors, providing not just spiritual help and prayer but practical support and ‘permission’ to speak out and be heard. His challenge is one which Hallam has embraced in its proactive rollout of the Hurt by Abuse leaflet and supporting information. The re-forming of the advisory group as SPEAC (Specialist Expert Advisory Charism) in recognition of the talents and gifts of survivors and those impacted by abuse and their role as teachers and leaders has been critical. With the blessing of the National Safeguarding Commission, Hallam is developing a number of projects which it is hoped will result in direct personalised support and advice to people who need it. Most important, perhaps, is our determination to make it easier for people to speak out and end the silencing of stories of hurt.

“SOMETHING INSIDE SO STRONG”