

A Vision of a Catholic Church **which Supports and Cares for those who have been Harmed**

This vision has developed from a consultation process involving people who identify as victims and survivors, and those who have experienced the impact of trauma and abuse. The vision reflects on the key areas of:

- Prevention
- Training
- Responding to allegations
- Support to those who have been harmed
- Accountability

This document, with detailed accounts of the experiences of survivors, was presented to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the 18th September 2010.

The group who met with Pope Benedict recognise that the Catholic Church in England and Wales has made progress in some of the objectives outlined in this vision, as have other parts of the Catholic Church, but asked His Holiness to kick-start a process through which this worldwide vision becomes a reality.

Prevention

- The Catholic Church will promote messages that Safeguarding and Child Protection reflects core Gospel imperatives.
- The Church will affirm the paramountcy of the rights of children.
- The Church will promote a message that those who abuse will be treated respectfully but must be held to account.
- There will be an acceptance that abuse can and does happen in faith communities and a willingness to understand and address the cultural and structural factors within the church that might make it more likely.
- Child abuse will be described as a crime for which the victims are not responsible.
- There will be awareness raising for all church groups and organisations.
- There will be educational/awareness programmes designed specifically for children and young people. This will require an openness to learning from the secular world about what helps children and young people to keep themselves safe.
- Churches and church organisations will properly recruit and designate children's advocates/witnesses so that there is always someone to whom children can turn.
- There will be helplines for those worried about their behaviour or the behaviour of others, which the church will resource, so that early intervention to divert abuse can be considered.

Training

- All training will be informed by experts in the field including survivors and children and young people.
- There will be a rolling programme of mandatory training, aimed particularly at existing clergy and leaders.
- There will be mandatory and thorough training in seminary and ongoing formation.
- Training will convey understanding of the causes and effects of abuse, an understanding of potential impacts on victims and how victims react and disclose.
- There will be specific training targeted at roles within specific responsibility/leadership in children's/youth work.

Responding to allegations

- All actions taken by the church will communicate that allegations are taken seriously.
- Everyone will know how to deal with disclosures.
- No-one will be deterred from reporting concerns, or asked to remain silent.
- In practice there will be immediate suspension from ministry of alleged perpetrators.
- All allegations will be reported to relevant statutory authorities.
- There will be full co-operation with all secular authorities in the investigation of allegations, which will include handing over relevant information.
- All internal processes for internal investigation of abuse allegations and related canonical processes will be speeded up.
- Where there is no conviction, all appropriate assessment and management measures will be put in place.
- No confidentiality agreements will be requested except where absolutely necessary to protect the integrity of criminal investigations.
- There will be strong and clear guidance about priests responsibilities if receiving disclosures in confession, either from those who have abused or from those reporting abuse.

Support and care for victims and those who have been harmed

- The Church will work with, not against victims and survivors, who are not the enemy of the Church.
- There will be an Expert Commission to oversee a long term strategy for victim services. Victims/Survivors will be used as expert witnesses and advisers.
- There will be properly resourced healing centres which the church will resource.
- The Church will demonstrate that it understands that victims/survivors have different needs.
- There will be a menu of services and recognition that the support needs of every individual are different.
- There will be holistic services to families of those affected by abuse.
- There will be a dedicated spiritual support and recognition of victim experiences in liturgical material.
- The Church will recognise that people whose faith has been compromised by abuse may need help from non-Catholic organisations as much as Catholic organisations for spiritual guidance about reclaiming their faith, and the church should support other appropriate organisations.
- In promoting messages of forgiveness, church leaders and those who speak on the issue will recognise the complexity of gospel exhortations to forgive and the pressure these may place on victims.
- The church will ensure that it has the mechanisms to provide practical support and appropriate restitution for victims.

Accountability

- The Church will joyously embrace the responsibilities of Safeguarding in Action as part of its mission for social justice and the common good and advocate for changes in social policy within jurisdictions where child abuse is not dealt with as a crime.
- There will be leadership from the top to develop a consistent professional One Church approach.
- There will be consistent policies, procedures and public audit of these against standards related to safety of victims and safe working building on established models of good practice.
- There will be actionable penalties for non compliance.
- The Church will continue to publicise information about how it handles new reported cases and what lessons it learns.