



**Victims of abuse address the church
in their own words**

Collated with an introduction by Andrew Graystone

My sincere thanks to my friends, who have contributed their experiences for this booklet, and who have allowed me to sit with them in the communion of the abused. You are not the problem.

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If you have been a victim of abuse in a church context or elsewhere, we encourage you to seek help. Whatever your role in the church, please don't let it stop you getting the support you deserve.

You could contact:

Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS)

08088 010340

www.macsas.org.uk

Victim Support

08081 6 89111

www.victimsupport.org.uk

The police, your doctor, or a local Sexual Assault Referral Centre

... or your diocesan safeguarding advisor.

Quotations from Archbishop Justin Welby are taken from his foreword to *Crucible*, July 2016, published by Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. with the exception of p8 and p11, which are from an interview with Channel 4 News, 2nd February 2017.

Quotation from Bishop Sarah Mullally, from her press conference following the Elliot Report

Quotation from Bishop Paul Butler, General Synod, July 2013 session

Introduction

For me, this began quite by chance. Working as a journalist and communications adviser, I got caught up in reporting the dreadful abuse attached to the Iwerne camps network. I suppose I had assumed that abuse in church contexts was rare and that, when it was uncovered, the church responded with love and commitment. I was wrong on both counts.

Over the past two years I have come to know a great many victims as friends. Some remain faithful members of their church. Others understandably never want to enter a church or meet a priest again. Some don't wish to revisit their abusive experiences. Others can't get through an hour of the day or night without reliving their personal horror.

I have asked a number of people who have been abused within a church context to answer my questions about the ways the church had responded to them. The answers you will read are their verbatim replies. They come from ten different individuals who were very seriously abused. Most of them don't know each other, and they answered individually. Some are priests themselves – most are not. Some are male and some are female (though all their abusers are men.) I have referred to them as victims, though some prefer the term “survivor.” All of the people whose words you will read have been physically or sexually abused in situations where the church has accepted some responsibility. They represent at least nine otherwise unrelated instances of church abuse. Their abusers include bishops, vicars, lay readers and other Church of England officials. In every case the ecclesial office of the abuser played a part in the abuse. All of them are recent, in that they have been dealing with the church's safeguarding procedures in the past two years, even if in some cases the original abuse is non-recent.

The victim must come first
Archbishop Justin Welby

Learning of my strange vocation, one senior church official complained to me “*You only speak to the unhappy victims. You never speak to the ones who are happy with the way they have been treated.*” I invited them to reflect on the idea of the happy victim! But they may have a point. If there *are* victims who feel the church has dealt with them well, I have yet to meet one. Amongst the scores of people I am in contact with, not one has had a good word to say about the way they have been dealt with by the church. There are no exceptions to this.

Another senior church leader said, “*You need to realise that some of these people are very damaged.*” I understand that very well. These are your damaged brothers and sisters. No doubt some of their damage was caused by their abusers. But in every case, further damage has been caused by ways the church has dealt with their abuse. That should be a matter for shame, for repentance and for radical action on the part of the church. These are not the church's enemies; they are the church's victims.

Most of the victims I know struggle with employment and personal relationships. That's because the devastating impact of abuse ripples out far beyond the act itself, causing collateral damage to partners, children, colleagues and friends. For some, financial compensation is an urgent matter that keeps them from homelessness and despair. For all of them, it serves as an indicator of how seriously the church takes its responsibility for what was done to them. That's why the delays and “horse-trading” by lawyers and insurance assessors are so evil. Of course there must be due process.

But the church's timetable cannot be allowed to prevail whilst complainants and alleged abusers wait in agony.

Some things have become clear to me.

- The pain felt by victims of abuse in the church is acute. It is a daily reality. If the injury is to the dignity, the confidence, the very personhood of a victim, then time does not necessarily heal. So the delay caused by waiting in silence for responses, reports, reviews and horse-trading only adds to the agony.
- The response of the church has been a sacrilege. Despite many pledges that "victims come first" the experience you will read about in the following pages indicates that this is not the case. From the victims' viewpoint it looks as if the interests of the church, its reputation and its power, have been put above the care of those who it has damaged. Nobody even knows how many complaints the church is dealing with. Perhaps most members of the church simply can't face up to the evil that has been done in its name.
- This is a singular moment of opportunity. We have an archbishop who understands how victims of abuse feel. The church has unprecedented opportunities for mission in a needy world. But revival is always preceded by repentance. The mission of the church will not take flight whilst the institution is burdened with its own unconfessed sins of abuse and neglect. Even if the Church of England dies in the coming decades, it must not leave a legacy of its own abuse.
- There are a great many people in the leadership of the church who are themselves victims of abuse, including at least a handful of serving bishops. And yet somehow we have made victimhood a matter of shame, so that any church leader who said "me too" would be seen as somehow tainted. I hope that soon, key church leaders will be able to identify themselves as victims of abuse, without fearing that they will join the ranks of the despised and rejected.

There's probably nothing unique about the church as a locus of abuse. There might be aspects of the beliefs and culture of the church that make it an attractive place for abusers to operate, but that's equally true of sports clubs, independent schools and show business. What ought surely to be unique is the way that the church responds when abuse occurs in its own ranks: with urgency, compassion, transparency and professionalism. The past few years have seen real progress in the church's approach to preventative safeguarding. The issue now is how to respond to victims. In 2013 years ago General Synod stood in silence as an act of repentance for its "institutional failings." Five years later, nothing substantive has changed. A church that moves in decades continues to impose its timetable on victims whose pain is counted in hours.

Nobody is suggesting that today's leaders take should personal responsibility for the evil acts of their predecessors. But archbishops, bishops, synod members perpetrate fresh abuse when the actions and inactions of system they oversee heightens the pain of victims.

Victims of abuse, whether bishops or unbelievers, are amongst the church's finest theologians, because they know what it is to have all the consolations of power and dignity stripped away from them. In the season of Easter, the church may want to reflect that if it cannot listen to the voices of victims, it will be unable to hear the voice of its own Saviour.

Victims' voices

How would you characterise the church's response to your situation?

More interested in protecting reputation and assets than authentic response. They are led by the instructions of lawyers and insurers. It's an adversarial response. *B (male)*

Cold, one sided and unwilling to take into account the gravity of the emotional and psychological damage caused to the complainant. It felt like all actions were being taken to minimise the effect on the church rather than to protect the complainant. *D (female)*

I would have to say it has been consistently poor. *N (male)*

The CofE has been incredibly unhelpful. It is now six years since I first reported abuse, and I have no idea who is "dealing with me." I have been passed around, like I am the troublemaker. They have been devoid of compassion. *W (male)*

The silencing of abuse victims is itself a form of abuse as bad if not worse than the first betrayal.

Archbishop Justin Welby

Terrible. Absent. *F (female)*

NST were awful. *Q (male)*

Appalling. The Church put themselves first and the survivor second. Reputation and how to not have a problem is uppermost in their thinking. *T (male)*

Fearful, defensive, always reactive rather than proactive, self-protecting. Run-through with empty rhetoric and fettered by legal pressure. *V (female)*

Far more traumatising than the abuse itself. Abuse of power on a far greater scale.

A (female)

Victims' voices

If you had to give one example of what's gone wrong, what would it be?

Blanking and silencing by bishops to major questions. Deferential diocesan structures that support the silencing. *B (male)*

Nothing was done to protect me. I was identified as a complainant on [an official document] and this was circulated to numerous third parties. The safeguarding officer admitted that this was their mistake and that they should have put their own name when sending in the complaint. However, when I challenged the church about this they were insistent that they had done nothing wrong.

D (female)

My Case Review took place in a diocese where the file was given to the police. Nearly two years on am still waiting for a response for support from the church and police. *F (female)*

The fact that I only received an offer of help from the Church when I went public in the national media about its silence in response to my suffering. Only when there was the threat of negative publicity did the Church grind into first gear. *N (male)*

A Diocesan Safeguarding Officer revealed my identity to my abusers. It took them 23 months to find me a counsellor. They then had no money to offer, so the counselling was paid for privately. *H (male)*

The wrong people in place to listen to survivors and their stories. *T (male)*

The reputation and well-being of the perpetrator and the parish and diocese were given priority over my needs and well-being. *V (female)*

Early, quick engagement would have allowed things to be resolved relatively easily.

Q (male)

Victims' voices

What's been the worst thing about the way the church has dealt with you?

Dishonesty. *B (male)*

Publishing my name. This showed complete incompetence and a lack of regard for someone that was already clearly suffering and already identified by the churches own safeguarding officers as vulnerable. This information was not kept confidential. This ultimately led to devastating circumstances. *D (female)*

For me the worst thing has been seeing the strategies of distancing, deceit and deflection by an organisation that should be modeling how institutions behave when abuse comes to light in its darkened corridors. It's simply not true to say that the CofE is doing better than other institutions like the BBC. The CofE is

How we respond to those who have survived abuse in any form, whether as a child or an adult, is a measure of our humanity, compassion and of the Church's mission in the world.

Bishop Sarah Mullally

meant to hold itself to a higher standard of compassion and transparency but treats victims as legal threats. *N (male)*

I've had to drive issues 100%.
B (male)

It has been the failure of anyone, including bishops, to say "Are you OK?"
H (male)

The complete lack of communication. Almost zero communication. Even ignoring complaints. *A (female)*

The many years of repeated ratcheting down of the substance and severity of my complaint. *V (female)*

Having no one to talk to or pray with about spiritual issues relating to my situation. *F (female)*

The worst think? The delays and the failure to communicate.

Q (male)

Victims' voices

What have the actions or inactions of the church done to you personally and/or those close to you?

Taken me to the brink of death. Literally. A (female)

My trust in the church has completely gone. D (female)

The silence – led me to drive my own case forward single-handedly – and nearly drove me to suicide. I rang Samaritans several times while senior bishops and Lambeth Palace remained silent. B (male)

All it has done to me personally is fill me with a great sadness concerning the Church I love.
N (male)

The victims are the people we care about most. They really, really matter.

Archbishop Justin Welby

It's made me sleep-deprived, short-tempered, unhappy and hard to live with.
Q (male)

It seems the hierarchy and the lawyers are desperate to keep any complaints under wraps and for them to disappear quickly no matter what the cost to the complainant. I and my children have been affected deeply by the church, the actions of the vicar in question, the safeguarding officer and the C of E as a whole, we will never forget the devastating effect that it had and continues to have on us all. D (female)

Isolated me and my family. We have been left on our own. F (female)

Made me question my faith. Caused massive problems within my family discussing the frustrations over many years. T (male)

Taken up a vast amount of time and dominated our lives for many years because if we had stopped demanding responses we would have been forgotten. Driven me into severe depression and anxiety. For my partner it has been emasculating, disempowering, demoralising, soul-sapping. They paid little attention to him. His needs were not even mentioned. Christian faith all but crushed. V (female)

They have compounded my trauma. The lack of interest, the lack of urgency, have left me "hanging on" with no sense any progress is being made.
H (male)

Victims' voices

What is your experience of diocesan safeguarding structures?

It's a lottery. Rigorous and independent accountability is severely lacking.
V (female)

Left me feeling like I was in the wrong. *F (female)*

Diocesan Safeguarding rep was v good. *Q (male)*

When you've been abused by a member of the clergy, the last people that you want to turn up on your doorstep to take a statement of complaint are two vicars in dog collars. In my opinion, safeguarding officers should not be members of the clergy. The whole procedure seemed disorganised, intimidating and rushed. *D (female)*

A DSA (Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser) almost literally saved my life – she kept me going through a very weird and lonely year when it felt like the rest of the Church was in total silence. One member of a Diocesan Safeguarding Committee mocked me sarcastically down the phone “What did you expect me to do – go bang on the door of Lambeth Palace for you?!” before putting the phone down. *B (male)*

I was dealt with by the bishop who had a totally inadequate safeguarding team. He resisted employing a full-time safeguarding adviser as he would ‘have to lose a parish priest’. *V (female)*

I've been appallingly let down by Diocesan Safeguarding teams. They haven't shown the slightest interest in keeping in touch. *H (male)*

Pathetic. Not helpful. *T (male)*

A voice of sanity and reason that related to the world we live in. It's as if the church are behind by 30 years but the safeguarding team live today. *A (female)*

The diocese where the review took place is not local to me, causing endless issues. There was no support and no funding for outside support because I didn't live in the region. *F (female)*

To address the whole culture of silencing in the Church is vital. It is vital because failure to do so is a form of abuse for the second time, as bad if not worse than the first betrayal.

Archbishop Justin Welby

More keen to protect the system rather than reach out and engage.

T (male)

Victims' voices

How helpful have senior church leaders (eg bishops) been since your abuse was disclosed?

The response of the bishop and senior leaders has not been helpful – it was controlling of information I gave freely and severely re-traumatising. I feel totally let down. I wish I hadn't trusted them. *V (female)*

We failed, big time. We can do nothing other than confess our sin, repent, and commit ourselves to being different in the years ahead.

Bishop Paul Butler (2013)

The Archdeacon and his wife are personal friends. They were superb, went many extra miles for me. *D (male)*

Negligible. I have had endless meetings and none have followed up, and done anything. *H (male)*

Bishop A said he wanted to help and so did Bishop B. Bishop B contacted Bishop C and was assured Bishop C would contact me. Of course he didn't. Hopeless. *Q (male)*

My abuser was listened-to and loved. I was treated as guilty. They hoped I'd go away. They covered their inadequate tracks. It's hard listening to them preach - it makes me want to stand up and shout that they are lying. One of them even turned and walked the other way to avoid me. *A (female)*

A lot of the communication felt contrived although the final letter of apology did feel very sincere. *D (female)*

I disclosed over 20 years ago. The actions of a bishop back then left me silenced, powerless. Recently, off my own back, I contacted two bishops to ask for help. One was initially good with providing literature and offered an open door. But now they seem to have withdrawn any offer of support. I am still waiting to hear from the other. *F (female)*

In fairness, the bishop who handled the procedure in my case was lovely towards me and very compassionate. It was very evident however, that he was heavily controlled by the advice from the church lawyers. *D (female)*

Victims' voices

What is your experience of the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team (NST)?

Dysfunctional, dishonest, unaccountable. It is beyond salvage – too much lasting harm and anger has been caused. Needs disbanding and starting afresh with real independent scrutiny. Its function should not be to protect the wishes and instructions of insurers. *B (male)*

Lambeth were bad. NST were awful *Q (male)*

It is not fit for purpose. They aren't compassionate or competent. *N (male)*

Terrible. No response. When I contacted a bishop to indicate that I had no support there was no response. They just referred to the NST, and I'm still awaiting a response. *F (female)*

I regularly meet with survivors of abuse, listen to their stories and every time I do it reinforces in me my own determination to put their interests first.

Archbishop Justin Welby

I had one meeting with NST when I was clearly told no counseling support was available (it was eventually offered over two months later). Other than that, I have heard nothing from them. I have no idea if there is a Core Group or anyone at all acting on my case. *W (male)*

Considerate and quickly responsive but ultimately quite powerless. *A (female)*

There appears to be no mechanism for accountability or making a complaint. *F (female)*

Helpful and insightful when they have time. But they have to fire-fight, write policy and deliver training with a skeletal staff means that they do not respond at all at times. They are unable to do anything but advise. They are caught up in a deeply conflicted structure. It forces them into the position of serving the structure foremost and stymieing a good response. *V (female)*

My experience of NST? Not helpful. Don't trust them.

T (male)

Victims' voices

Is there anything that you think the church has done well in its dealings with you?

I have nothing positive to say about the CofE or Safeguarding at National or Diocesan level. *H (male)*

No. *F (female)*

It has tried to help. *T (male)*

Provided the most wonderful counselling. *A (female)*

The apology that I received from the bishop on behalf of the Church of England was very important to me as it went some way to acknowledge the wrong doings of the vicar in question. *D (female)*

Paid for years of life-saving therapy. *V (female)*

When I became Archbishop of Canterbury I had mistakenly believed that the major changes needed in outlook had already been achieved. It very quickly became apparent that [safeguarding] would have to be an area of major concern.

Archbishop Justin Welby

***Anything the church has done well?
I'm afraid that would be a no.***

N (male)

Victims' voices

What could the church do better to help victims of abuse like yourself?

Respond quickly and take questions seriously. Put survivors first. Create a fair and just reparation structure. Recognise impact on our lives. Listen and learn from expertise of survivors. Involve survivors in creating a structure focused on healing – not protection of institution. Become honest. Stop the denial culture. *B (male)*

Listen to the words of Isaiah: a bruised reed he will not break (tender compassion for abuse sufferers) and he will bring forth justice in truth (a greater integrity when it comes to truth-telling and a greater fairness when it comes to the process and quantity of compensation). *N (male)*

The proper response to survivors, and the embedding of a proper culture of safeguarding in every part of the Church still has a very long way to go.

Archbishop Justin Welby

The church has to act with compassion, act efficiently and listen to victims. No-one has shown the slightest interest in listening to my story. *H (male)*

Listen. Go the extra mile. Forget reputations and positions. *T (male)*

Listen to survivors. Work with us, rather than as enemies to learn lessons so that things can be better for future victims. *Q (male)*

Pretty much respond like the gospel message not the legal Pharisees. *A (female)*

Always keep in mind the actions of the perpetrator. Avoid diverting all attention to my reaction to the abuse and their response to me reporting it. Seek to build-up victims of abuse rather than wear them down, drive them away and then blame them for the fact that they have been driven away. *V (female)*

Not live in fear. Structures and policy are never more important than people or Jesus. *F (female)*

***Listen. Be honest. Take responsibility.
Say sorry.***

A (female)

What message would you like to send to the church regarding the ways it deals with victims of abuse?

Why have you got this all so wrong, when you've heard so many times over so many years that you need to change?

B (male)

Please treat me as a person. At least reply to correspondence. *F (female)*

Stop listening to your lawyers and insurers and let the "pastoral" eclipse the "legal" in these and all related matters. *N (male)*

Don't be so defensive. *Q (male)*

You have to change. Listen, learn, change. And most importantly, how about some Christian care and compassion? *H (male)*

Consider it a privilege to engage with someone's story. Don't re-abuse the survivor. Listen and Listen again. If you are not up for listening consider a different occupation. Don't cover up. Don't be bullied by lawyers, insurers and heavy senior management. Go the extra mile. Be kind and compassionate even if you hear things that don't make sense. *T (male)*

Treat us like victims not perpetrators. Compassion would be good. *A (female)*

Please commission a totally independent body to receive reports of clergy and church-based abuse. Diocesan safeguarding teams can continue to do their job but make them answerable and accountable to an independent body rather than just encouraged to take advice. *V (female)*

You need to be victim-focussed rather than acting to minimise the possible negative effect upon the Church of England and its employees. This stance quickly becomes apparent to a victim when embroiled in the whole complaints procedure. The church needs to be transparent in its dealings with a victim. Long delays and lack of communication cause untold distress. *D (female)*

The culture around how survivors of abuse are heard has in effect been to tell them to be quiet, and to keep them away from the love of Christ.

Archbishop Justin Welby

Imagine yourself as a victim and think how you would want to be treated.

Q (male)

What needs to be done locally

Victims need friends

When a complainant makes an allegation against a member of the church, they should *immediately* be invited to choose an Independent Accompanier from a list of people accredited and funded by the church. This person will be their advocate and supporter throughout the process of resolution. A comparable system is widely used in secular contexts.

Victims need timely resolutions

A timetable should be set immediately for the resolution of the complaint. Ideally this would be no more than six months – after which the church should have to explain the delay or be deemed to have accepted liability. A legal process against an abuser is different – that might take months or years, or it might not be available at all. But when a complaint is against the church itself, it is intolerable for complainants to be left with no timescale for resolution.

What needs to be done nationally

Emphatically NOT another report or review! There have been many inquiries into abuse in the church, and with a few exceptions they have changed little. Instead they are viewed by many victims as a mark of complacency – an avoidance tactic by the church. NOT another bishops' training day! This requires a **new culture**, not a new resolution.

Synod should impose **minimum standards** on dioceses for the care of victims. Dioceses should be required to report on complaints they have received, and whether and how they have been settled. It is extraordinary that no-one knows how many cases of abuse the national church is facing. It is unethical that bishops and others should make discretionary payments to victims and abusers that go unrecorded in diocesan accounts.

There needs to be a **new reparation system**. If victims really *do* come first, bishops cannot slavishly defer to lawyers and insurance companies. Bizarrely, the church maintains financial links with an insurance company of which it is both client and beneficiary. Every diocese receives grants from EIG/AllChurches Trust, and senior church figures sit on their board. Victims can have no confidence in the fairness and justice of the system, nor believe that the church is making the care of victims its priority, while the same coterie who are supposedly acting as pastors also have an interest in the insurance business that is their major donor.

Safeguarding in dioceses and the national church should be **independently inspected** for quality. The current system of auditing by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) seems to most victims to be little more than a fig leaf - an ineffective box-ticking exercise.

A senior figure should be appointed by the national church with the **care of victims** as their sole priority. This person must be resourced for the role and empowered to hold bishops to account. It may not be appropriate for this person to be ordained, since priests and bishops are understandably not trusted by many victims.

"I defy any caring, thinking Christian, to read this important document and not be deeply moved and energised by the experience. The way in which any Church responds to survivors of clerical abuse, is an accurate barometer of their spiritual health. "

Ian Elliott - Safeguarding Consultant. Author of the Elliott Review (2016)

