



DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

STRATEGY

RESPONDING TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

“You can recognize survivors of abuse by their courage. When silence is so very inviting, they step forward and share their truth, so others know they aren't alone.”

Jeanne McElvaney, Healing Insights: Effects of Abuse for Adults Abused as Children

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Foreword

As a concrete diocesan response to CSSA National Standard 3 that commits us, as a Church, *“to respond to any disclosure of abuse with compassion and care, seeking to provide signposting as appropriate to support and advice, and to offer pastoral care tailored to the needs of the individual”*, this document lays out a clear strategy for responding to the victims and survivors of abuse of all kinds. It offers a set of principles and strategic aims which form the basis of our care for those affected by abuse.

We have learned over the last decades that people who have been harmed by abuse have often been badly let down by the inadequate response of the Church community at large and by its leadership in particular. There has all too frequently been more interest in protecting the reputation of the institution rather than listening to the voice of the survivor. In doing so we have failed to take seriously the words of Jesus in St Matthew’s Gospel that we should, *“always treat others as you would like them to treat you”* (Matthew 7:12).

The strategic aims and the outline of how we will deliver the strategy, which are laid out in this document, offer a clear vision of how we will respond to, and offer support to, the victims and survivors of abuse. The strategy also commits to an annual review, so that we can apply any new learnings we may make to our ongoing work with those who have been hurt by abuse.

I want to thank those who have been part of the creation and development of this document, which will be a useful tool for all in the Diocese whose ministry and work will bring them into contact with the victims and survivors of abuse. May God bless all those who have been harmed by abuse and all those who walk alongside them to support them. May His unconditional love give hope, dignity and healing.

Canon Paul Cummins

Diocesan Administrator

Introduction

This document forms part of the three-year Safeguarding Plan (2021-2024) and, as such, is one of the key elements of how safeguarding is being progressed within the Diocese of Plymouth. It sets out the Diocese's strategic aims in its response to victims and survivors of abuse and expresses its commitment to providing the necessary on-going support.

There is no hiding from the impact of abuse, above all its devastating impact on those who have been abused, which historically has been compounded within the Catholic Church by poor leadership and practice, often involving cover ups and the failure to act against perpetrators ⁽¹⁾.

Moving forward, where in the past the leadership and structures of the Church have failed to respond appropriately, they must do all they can to work with and support those who have been harmed by abuse, whether that abuse occurred within or outside the Church community. This will require effective and compassionate leadership from the Diocese and its safeguarding structures, together with determination, a clear sense of purpose and sufficient resources to enable an effective response.

Whilst this will necessarily include a certain amount of structural and organisation change, the primary focus must be on the person who has been harmed, since abuse strips them of their sense of being and value, of their dignity, identity, and self-respect. As such, on-going and flexible provision needs to be put in place that will support and empower those who have been hurt, which is respectful of each individual's needs and of the unique challenges of their journey.

(1) Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Investigation Report – The Roman Catholic Church 2020 page 116

Key Strategic Aims

In setting out our key strategic aims, there are several underlying principles that need to be made explicit.

We must not allow ourselves to become desensitised or complacent since, regrettably, we are unlikely to see an end to abuse in society. Consequently, we must be proactive in preventing it happening in the Diocese. We must ensure that where such matters do come to our attention, we respond appropriately,

regardless of where the harm occurred and who is responsible, and that we do so in accordance with the best available safeguarding practice.

We must continue to be self-examining, unafraid, open to criticism, always learning and accountable, not only internally but also externally.

We recognise that to tackle abuse in the Church effectively, those who have been directly affected by abuse, together with those around them, must be seen as part of the future and, indeed, as an essential part of the solution.

Strategic Aim 1 – To ensure an effective initial and on-going response to allegations

The Diocese of Plymouth is committed to responding to those who have been hurt by others regardless of where, when and in what form that harm might have occurred. We will do so in a compassionate and non-judgemental manner, recognising and supporting the rights and dignity of the individual, and being clear that every person is of equal importance in the sight of God. We will also be survivor-centred, ensuring that victims/survivors have access to all appropriate information so that they have as much control as possible over processes and are empowered to make their own decisions.

Strategic Aim 2 – To embed safeguarding into the ministry of the Church

The Diocese of Plymouth will ensure that the observance and promotion of safeguarding principles and practice is seen as an authentic and essential element of all forms of ministry within the Diocese, allowing the Church to live its life and mission in harmony with its foundational, Gospel-inspired values. As part of this commitment, appropriate resources will be made available, and these resources will be the subject of ongoing review with regards to supporting both the safeguarding structures and the individuals concerned.

Strategic Aim 3 – To work in a trauma-informed manner

The Diocese of Plymouth will always adopt trauma-informed approaches and, when working with individuals, we will adhere to the five principles of trauma-informed care - safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and choice – so as to understand the physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma not only on the individual, but also on the professionals who help them.

Strategic Aim 4 – To be open and transparent

The Diocese of Plymouth recognises the need to be open and transparent not only to those with whom we work, but also to society. We must listen and continue to learn. We must be able to accept and respond to justified criticism and continue to adapt and improve. At all times we must be bold and unafraid to challenge ourselves and others where necessary.

Strategic Aim 5 – To engage with survivors

The Diocese of Plymouth is committed to engaging with survivors, recognising that they are experts through their experiences. We will listen to and work with survivors, involving them in creating the safeguarding provision in the Diocese.

How we will deliver the strategy:

- We will maintain and resource a professional response both to the management of concerns and to those who bring those concerns.
- We will work to ensure that safeguarding is integral to the Church's mission and understood to be everyone's responsibility.
- We will ensure safeguarding is promoted at all levels within the Diocese.
- We will provide appropriate and ongoing training to church volunteers and to the clergy.
- We will ensure that all staff and volunteers are appropriately recruited in line with best safeguarding practice.
- We will provide ongoing support and supervision to all members of the Safeguarding Team.
- We will work with the Statutory Authorities, other faith groups, charities, and individuals to provide a comprehensive and supportive service to all those with whom we engage.
- We will seek and respond to the views and opinions of others, especially the survivors of abuse, to ensure that we maintain inclusivity, honesty, openness and transparency.
- We will continue to learn, constantly reviewing what we are doing, how we are doing it and how we need to develop and progress.
- We will regularly review the progress we make and the support we provide.

Review

This strategy will be reviewed annually.

Additional reading and reference documents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-action-plan-to-tackle-child-abuse-linked-to-faith-or-belief>

https://www.academia.edu/6003951/towards_a_theology_of_safeguarding?auto=download

<https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/>

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Healing-Insights-Effects-Adults-Children/dp/1484065646>

Resources and sources of help and support

<https://operationemotion.co.uk/>

<https://www.momentumdevon.org.uk/>

<https://www.saltsouthwest.co.uk/>

<https://www.firstlight.org.uk/>

<https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/>

<https://napac.org.uk/>

<https://survivorsvoices.org/>

<https://www.medaille-trust.org.uk/>

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