

Bishop David Walker's statement on the Makin Review

12th November 2024

Following the publication of an independent review by Keith Makin into the historic, serious abuse by the late John Smyth, and the announcement of the forthcoming resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop David Walker has reaffirmed his commitment to safeguarding. He said:

"I have been profoundly moved by the terrible details that have emerged with the publication of the Makin Review into the abuse by John Smyth, along with the failure of multiple church leaders, from at least the early 1980s onwards, to expose his crimes. I share the concerns of so many, within and beyond our clergy and congregations, that this could take place in the Church that we care for so deeply.

"The testimonies of those who have suffered remind us of the deep and lasting harm caused by those whose faith in Jesus should have led them to protect them. My thoughts and prayers are with the survivors, in this country and in Africa, who have had to live with the consequences of Smyth's abuse for many years. They have shown great courage in coming forward, and as bishops we must listen carefully and act to ensure such abuse and failings in safeguarding are never repeated.

"I understand the reasons why Archbishop Justin has felt it right to announce that he will resign his office. However, as Makin makes clear, this is not a case of a single point of failure, but rather of a culture that was deeply embedded in parts of the Church. Smyth's abuses were known about over 40 years ago. They were repeatedly hidden by those who could have exposed him, but misguidedly felt that secrecy furthered the gospel.

"Bishop Mark, Bishop Matthew and I remain deeply committed to ensuring that churches in Manchester Diocese are safe places for all. Good safeguarding lies at the heart of our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. It requires courageous leadership at every level, from parishes, schools and chaplaincies to our diocesan and national structures. It also demands a determination to challenge cultural obstacles to good safeguarding wherever and whenever they rear their heads.

"I do however, want to take this opportunity to thank our many clergy, lay leaders and volunteers, who share my horror at all forms of abuse, and who work tirelessly to make our church communities welcoming and safe for all among whom we minister and witness in the name of Jesus Christ. I pray that these shameful disclosures will strengthen, rather than damage, our determination to do this gospel work to the best of our abilities.

"In this difficult moment, I remain committed to the ongoing work of ensuring that safeguarding in our diocese operates within a culture that is completely focused on the needs and voices of victims and survivors."

The Right Reverend Prof. David Walker

Bishop of Manchester

David Walker

