



General Secretariat

Tel: 01236 764061
Fax: 01236 762489
Email: gensec@bcos.org.uk
Web: www.bcos.org.uk

64 Aitken Street
AIRDRIE
Lanarkshire
ML6 6LT

Pastoral Letter for distribution to Congregations on Pentecost Sunday 2018

My Dear People,

I write, on behalf of all the Bishops of Scotland, to draw your attention to the publication of our Church's new Safeguarding materials which come into force on 21st May 2018. These include '*In God's Image*', the document which offers comprehensive guidance and instruction on every aspect of Safeguarding, including compliance with new Safeguarding standards. This has been shaped by the recent experience and developing expertise of those involved in the front line of Safeguarding in the Church, both in Scotland and internationally. In ratifying this publication, the Bishops have taken the opportunity to repeat and renew apologies made to those who have suffered any form of abuse, at any time, by anyone representing the Church.

Your Bishops want you to know that we aspire to the highest standards of care and protection of all, and we are committed to rebuilding trust and confidence in the ways in which we ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe. We are most grateful to the teams of Safeguarding personnel in all Dioceses and to over 9,000 trained volunteers who support the work of parishes and religious congregations across Scotland.

The publication of these materials marks the end of a period in which the Church has been working quietly, but tirelessly, to implement the recommendations of the McLellan Commission that reported in August 2015.

Since 2013 we have published annual audits of allegations reported to us each year. Last month, we also published a historical review of non-recent cases of abuse, covering the period 1943–2005. The publication of our annual audits, the historical review and our new Safeguarding materials demonstrate our ongoing commitment to openness and transparency.

We recognise, however, that publications alone are not enough. Regular reviews and rigorous scrutiny by those both inside and outside the church will be required, as will independent evaluation.

An Independent Review Group, chaired by Baroness Helen Liddell, comprising a team of experienced and distinguished experts in safeguarding, child protection and education has overseen the implementation of the McLellan recommendations and is now examining our annual Safeguarding Audits. Each year, this autonomous group will scrutinise the work of two of the eight dioceses in Scotland alongside a review of the work of Religious Orders.

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We also recognise that engagement with survivors of abuse is crucial and we can reveal that, for some years now, each Bishop has been meeting with survivors and will continue to do so. Given the profound and sensitive nature of this issue, such encounters take place discreetly, at times and places suited to the needs of the survivors. We have encountered survivors who simply want to be listened to, to be heard, and to be understood. Others express a need for counselling, spiritual guidance or some form of redress. Some want to live their lives without any contact from the Church or its representatives. Each of these wishes must be respected and addressed as far as possible.

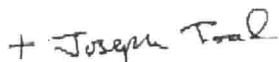
The first chapter of Genesis tells us that humans are created “in the image of God”, making each human life inherently valuable and giving each person an innate and precious dignity. Sadly, the dignity of the most vulnerable has not always been recognised or protected by individuals and by organisations. We have seen, with cruel repetition, scandals engulfing politics, football, show business and most recently, the international aid sector. The Church shares in this scandal and our shame is greater, because our expectation of safety, care and compassion are higher.

We know that Jesus identifies profoundly with children, the poor, the needy and the vulnerable and we learn that how we personally respond to the vulnerable will be relevant to our eternal destiny. We read in the Gospel of St Matthew that, at the Last Judgement, it will be no good saying: “When did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?” For then he will answer: “I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me”.

This makes Safeguarding, for all of us, a pressing priority in every parish, diocese and religious congregation. We must prioritise our compliance with our new Safeguarding standards, initially by becoming familiar with them and then through continuing participation in training events provided in each Diocese and nationally.

Through the protection and care we show to all, and through the compassion, healing and justice we offer to those who have survived abuse, we must continue to renew, rebuild and restore faith and hope in the church by offering faith and hope to one another. At this time of Pentecost we pray that the power of the Holy Spirit will strengthen us in our efforts to do so.

Yours devotedly in Christ,



+ Joseph Toal

Bishop of Motherwell

*responsible for Safeguarding
on behalf of the Bishops of Scotland*