



*A Letter from the Team Rector, Safeguarding Officer, and Leadership Team
in response to the Makin Report and Resignation of Archbishop Justin Welby.*

15th November 2024

Dear Friends,

The Archbishop of Canterbury is resigning in recognition of his own failure and the failure of the wider church across 50 years to stop a predator from abusing vulnerable people. The Makin Report makes shocking reading in the way the church did not act to bring the perpetrator to justice. We wish to state in the clearest possible terms our commitment to stand with all who have been abused or hurt, to listen, and to act to protect vulnerable people whenever it is necessary. Two weeks ago Richard Sewell (Dean of St George's College Jerusalem) spoke in St Mary's of having the courage to stand up and name evil as evil. As church leaders we name as evil the actions of John Smyth and we stand against all forms of abuse. Those who abuse must not be protected from the law- it makes no odds who they are. Our prayers now are for those who have been harmed by his actions.

Scripture could not be clearer about the special place in God's heart for vulnerable and voiceless people. All through the Bible we read of God's special concern for poor and marginalised people, outsiders and oppressed people, widows, strangers, orphans, and all without social power. Jesus Christ crossed boundaries to be with people who society did not listen to or see. Nowhere do we see a God who cares more for institutional reputation than for the protection of the vulnerable. When our church has failed over so many years faithfully to follow God's way in this regard there is need for repentance and change. Archbishop Justin's resignation is part of this repentance and, we pray, the beginning of a further chapter of deep reflection, learning, and change. Repentance is not repentance unless there is change.

Our church is wounded by this and by other institutional failures and we understand that very many people no longer see the C of E as a trustworthy body. 'Trust', they say, 'leaves on horseback and returns on foot'. Some of us will take a long time to begin to trust the church again; some may never manage to do so. Others of us are angry at senior leaders and the national organisation which seems to undermine the safe, valuable work carried out in parishes every day by clergy and lay people in faithful service. Others are simply devastated that a community that preaches healing and the Kingdom of God has been proved to be anything but safe. Whatever our position it will be a long journey before we can talk meaningfully of healing.

In any gathering there are as many stories as there are people and some of our stories will be of deep hurt which we may never have shared with others. The recent events may well have triggered some of us to relive painful experiences and memories. We need to be gentle with each other and not assume things of each other, whoever we are, including our leaders. If you need to talk we promise you that we will listen, not make assumptions, believe you and not judge you. We will report all concerns about anyone's safety every time that this is necessary.

Our parish safeguarding Officer is Yo Davies who works constantly to ensure that our safeguarding policy is fulfilled. The Smyth case shows what happens when processes are not followed. As a church we work together to put in place all the safeguards we can and to educate volunteers. This training helps us all and ensures that everyone who volunteers knows the right processes if they have any concerns. We want curiosity and concern for others. All situations that we are alerted to, however small or even seemingly trivial are treated with care, confidentiality, support for the concerned person and the person about whom the report is made.

This diocese also has a good, experienced team who do deal with things effectively and who work with us. It has learned from previous mistakes and a recent independent audit has praised its efforts.

As church members you know just how much work we do with many different groups of people of all ages and vulnerabilities, from toddler groups to the Big Sing, from choristers to housebound visits, from TIG to the lunch club... All of these and more rely on generous volunteers. Thank you to everyone who gives of your time to show out the love of God in these diverse ways. Thank you too that you have taken part in DBS checks, safer recruitment processes, and ongoing safeguarding training. It can seem laborious but it is all part of our commitment to being a safe church for all.

To see national leaders not listening and not acting on reports of abuse does shake our trust but we hope that you will see that we are committed to keeping everyone safe and to supporting victims and survivors of any sort of abuse wherever and whenever it took place.

A Prayer for all abused or wounded by the church:

*Broken hearted God,
You hear the voiceless
and see the people who we have made invisible.
Your wounded Son came that all may have life in abundance
And died that all may receive new life.
Enfold in your love and surround with your protection
All who have suffered abuse, violence, or the wrongful use of power,
And teach us to build communities of safety, healing and truth
Where everyone can flourish in safety.
In Christ who was broken that we might be made whole. Amen*

On Sunday 24th November we will mark Safeguarding Sunday at our joint 10am service at St Mary's on the theme: '*Lets Talk About It*'. Please come and be part of it.

If you would like to talk to any of us please do not hesitate to be in touch. We are all available and we are not too busy. Thank you for the privilege of serving God's people with you in this community,

The Rev'd Canon Felicity Scroggie (Team Rector)
Mrs Yo Davies (Parish Safeguarding Officer)
The Rev'd Paul Charles, The Rev'd Paula Clifford, The Ven David Meara, The Rev'd Marian Needham, The Rev'd Sarah Sewell, The Rev'd Katie Tupling