

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

17 JUNE 2023

QUESTIONS – FIRST NOTICE PAPER (with answers)

- 1) Canon Peter Adams (Luton Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St Albans as President of the Diocesan Synod:

"There is a substantial call from members of General Synod, reflected now in a private members motion, calling for allegations of abuse concerning Mike Pilavachi at Soul Survivor, and a number of accusations of cover up, to be submitted for investigation by an independent King's Counsel. While this has not been the usual practice to date by the National Safeguarding Team, there is a growing concern that the church is "marking its own homework". Bearing in mind the importance of a satisfactory and trusted outcome to this very sad situation so as to ensure justice for all impacted, and a full understanding of what has gone wrong, would the Bishop please work with the NST to establish such an independent inquiry?"

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

I thank Canon Adams for his question.

I want to fully acknowledge that some within the diocese and beyond may be feeling conflicted, upset, concerned or angry by what you have read about the investigation into Mike Pilavachi.

I also acknowledge that these feelings may be exacerbated since we are limited in our ability to respond to ongoing reporting in traditional and social media due to the constraints of the investigation. Where possible, updates are provided in conjunction with the National Safeguarding Team at <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-news-and-releases>.

At the same time, I must assure you of our commitment to support anyone affected by this situation, particularly those who are coming forward with information. We are equally committed to the principle that the investigation must be fair to all parties.

As Diocesan Bishop I am constrained by the *Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016*. Under this measure all authorised clergy, bishops, archdeacons, licensed readers and lay workers, churchwardens and PCCs **must have 'due regard'** to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops. Failure by clergy to comply with the duty imposed by the 2016 Measure may result in disciplinary action.

The House of Bishops' *Practice Guidance: Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers* established that it is for the Core Group handling a safeguarding case to make a recommendation for an independent enquiry, and that this will ordinarily follow after the immediate response to the safeguarding concern has been completed. If I was to call for an independent enquiry at this stage and without such a recommendation, I would be outside of House of Bishops' Guidance and would risk prejudicing the outcome of the current investigation.

In particular, I am conscious that issuing calls now about the shape of the next stage of any response might cause confusion as to the processes currently underway and the support available now. Those who have been affected by this case or who would like to raise any concerns should contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team at safeguarding@stalbans.anglican.org or the National Safeguarding Team at safeguarding@churchofengland.org. Those who would prefer to speak to someone independently may call the Safe Spaces helpline on 0300 303 1056.

- 2) Canon Peter Adams (Luton Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St Albans as President of the Diocesan Synod:

"At the March diocesan synod we discussed plans for growing younger and more diverse. In many discussions on this theme, the inspiration, experience and models of Soul Survivor have been referenced, and indeed that church seen as an invaluable resource. Obviously, the nature of an active investigation precludes anticipation of findings. Yet many young people, youth workers and indeed churches are asking deep questions that without reassurance are very corrosive of faith, and seem to undermine our hopes and plans. While this is not a time for reputation management for Soul Survivor or indeed the diocese, would the Bishop give us some understanding of how we move forward at this time?"

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

I thank Canon Adams for his question.

Regardless of the current investigation and any potential outcomes, the ministry of Soul Survivor has had a major impact on the diocese including being a significant source of vocations, training and support for parishes. However, the plans for growing younger and more diverse as a diocese are not predicated on a 'Soul Survivor' model. Instead, there is a determination to build on all traditions and all models of successful engagement with those we must bring into our churches.