



General Synod Update

Future of Church Safeguarding

Item 10

INEQE Safeguarding Group: Annual Report 2024

For many years, the Church and its community were profoundly let down. Individuals in positions of authority failed those who worked and worshipped within it, prioritising the institution's reputation over the well-being of its members and the wider community. They hid behind, or failed to challenge, outdated and arcane church laws – rules that baffle ordinary people who possess a simple understanding of right and wrong. Over time, insult was added to injury as the Church appeared incapable of change. These truths make it incredibly difficult to view the contemporary Church through anything other than the lens of a deeply troubling past.

INEQE Safeguarding Group: Annual Report 2024

However, the Church of yesterday is not the Church of today. Moral outrage and public exposure have driven significant change. This does not mean that non-recent cases will not surface – indeed, we must hope that they do. Nor does it mean that offending in a contemporary sense will cease entirely. But it does mean that, when it does occur, it is now more likely to be challenged and addressed with the victim and survivor's best interests at the forefront.

INEQE Safeguarding Group: Annual Report 2024

The systems in place are demonstrably better. Those on the front line of safeguarding are more aware, and the Church's blended safeguarding teams – comprised of credible safeguarding professionals with previous experience from statutory or equivalent services – are driven by a safeguarding-first philosophy that is constantly evolving and improving.

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Independent scrutiny and mechanisms to hold those responsible for the safety of others to account are absolutely critical. They ensure compliance with standards and drive continuous improvement. Effective external scrutiny complements internal mechanisms and governing bodies, all of whom are accountable for their organisations. That said, when it comes to delivering effective safeguarding practice – practice that genuinely works and makes a difference – it is most effectively delivered from within, not imposed from without.

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That this Synod:

- a. thank all those involved in Church safeguarding, particularly the victims and survivors who give so generously of their wisdom and experience, often at great personal cost, and parish safeguarding officers who make sure that safeguarding is a priority in every level and all those who support them in dioceses;
- b. affirm its commitment to greater independence in safeguarding in the Church of England;

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- c. thank the Response Group for its work for greater independence in safeguarding in the Church of England; and, noting the significant reservations around model 4 in paragraph 62 of GS 2378 and the legal advice from VWV dated 31st January 2025, endorse model 3 as the way forward in the short term and call for further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4;
- d. and lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to victims and survivors and the harm they have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church.

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