Durham University
Centre for Catholic Studies

The Cross of the Moment

A Report from the Boundary Breaking Project

Pat Jones, Marcus Pound, Catherine Sexton

We would rather be ruined than changed.
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.

W. H. Auden,
The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue (1948)

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Care

This report is about sexual abuse and contains many accounts of the harm of abuse and of inadequate response to victims and survivors. Some may find it difficult or upsetting to read. Please be mindful of yourself when reading. If you feel the need to talk to someone about your personal experience after reading the report, you could approach one of the following:

- A parish safeguarding representative (if you belong to a local parish community)
- Safe Spaces **Home - Safe Spaces England and Wales https://www.safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/**

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We are grateful to Northampton Diocese for permission to use the cover image.

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Abbreviations

CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBCEW	Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
CCS	Centre for Catholic Studies
CFL	Christifideles Laici: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (John Paul II, 1989)
COPCA	Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Adults
CQC	Care Quality Commission
CSA	Child sexual abuse
CSAS	Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service
CSSA	Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (2021 onwards)
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
EBC	English Benedictine Congregation
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IICSA	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
NCSC	National Catholic Safeguarding Commission
PCPM	Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors
PDV	Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (John Paul II, 1992)
RLSS	Religious Life Safeguarding Service
SJ	Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
SVP	St Vincent de Paul Society

Sources and Notes

Throughout the text, we have provided contextual and illustrative information in boxes alongside the text. There are also endnotes, most of which give sources. A few add further relevant material.

Where we have quoted from papal documents or other Catholic teaching texts, the title and paragraph reference are either in the text or in an endnote. All the versions cited can be found on the Vatican website unless otherwise specified.

The appendix gives details of some useful books, articles and texts we would recommend for further reading. It is not a full bibliography from the research.

Chapter One

Introduction: A whole-Church perspective

1. What the report is about and how the research was done

This report is about the impact and implications of clerical child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It explores how the abuse crisis has been experienced by different groups within the Church, most painfully by victims and survivors of abuse and their families, and also affecting parish communities, laypeople, priests, deacons, bishops, religious communities and others. It is a crisis because it has tested and, in some ways, broken crucial parts of what we thought we knew about ourselves as a Catholic community. It has caused deep harm and damage, and the impact continues still, most profoundly for victims and survivors, and for our life as a Church and our mission here in England and Wales. Our concern in this report is not just with the impact of the abuse itself, but also with how it has been handled and mishandled by institutional figures and processes and how this has affected our confidence and relationships in the Church.

The report explores how some of our habits and practices as a Church are implicated in how clerical child abuse was allowed to happen and how the pastoral and institutional response has often caused further pain and harm. It is now well accepted in broader study about abuse in the Catholic Church that we need to look beyond the idea that abuse happens because of a few 'bad apples'. Whilst individual abusers are always responsible for their own actions, there are structures, cultures and practices which contribute to the many factors involved in the harm done. Since those structures, cultures and practices have roots in our faith and in Catholic teaching and theology, we need to examine aspects of these too. This is a search not just for explanations but more importantly for greater fidelity. Pope Francis has proposed that to move forward, we need 'a continuous and profound conversion of hearts attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church'.[1] We need to become a more compassionate, just and truthful community, one that reflects ever more deeply what the Gospel means in practice.

This report seeks to encourage us to pay better attention to an experience which has shocked and shaken the Catholic Church here in England and Wales and in many other countries. In responding as a whole church, it is not enough to ensure that there are strong and effective safeguarding standards, policies and procedures and professional safeguarding staff. We must listen and work to understand more fully what this crisis means and to nurture a culture which faces up to the questions asked with honesty and humility.

Explaining the research

The report is based on research undertaken by a team working within the Centre for Catholic Studies (CCS) at Durham University in the UK. The research, named the Boundary Breaking project, began in 2019 and finished in 2023. It was funded by Porticus, a Catholic grant-making trust, and two religious orders, the British province of the Jesuits and the English Benedictine Congregation. The team consisted of Dr Marcus Pound, Dr Catherine Sexton and Dr Pat Jones, working with assistance and advice from Professor Paul D. Murray and Professor Karen Kilby and supported by Yvonne Williams. Dr Giuseppe Bollota was part of the research team in the first year and Adrian Brooks joined the team for eighteen months to undertake a literature review to assist the theological reflection. To support the research, a steering committee was set up, chaired by Dr Julie Clague from the University of Glasgow. In addition, there was a stakeholder group bringing together a group of people with relevant expertise or experience and/or representing bodies such as the Conference of Religious, the body that brings together the leaders of religious congregations working in England and Wales.[2] Both groups included members who are survivors of abuse. The research has operated under strong ethical principles as required both by the nature of the task and by Durham University.

The research focussed primarily on the sexual abuse of children involving diocesan and religious priests or brothers that had taken place in Catholic institutions in England and Wales. This was not an exclusive focus. Several survivors who spoke to us described abuse carried out by laypeople teaching in Catholic schools, and a couple of the survivors were older when the abuse happened, young adults in a position where their abusers held power over their lives in some way. In other words, we examined sexual abuse where the institution and ministry or leadership structures of the Church were implicated. We also gave priority to the exploration of *sexual* abuse, whilst recognising that this is part of a spectrum which includes emotional, physical and spiritual abuse. Some survivors had experienced all these dimensions. All are damaging and wrong and some are criminal. Our focus is on sexual abuse because this is uniquely intrusive and harmful, as wider literature affirms, and on abuse by priests, because this is such a deep betrayal of ethical and theological principles which are central to Catholic faith and teaching.

From the beginning, the aim in this research has been to offer a constructive and useful resource to the Catholic community in England and Wales. The report provides a narrative of how the whole community has experienced the impact of the abuse crisis as well as analysis and reflection on cultures and systems implicated in how abuse has happened. As far as we are aware, there is no other research in these countries which allows voices from a wide range of experiences and vocations to be heard talking about this issue. We hope it will assist people to listen, learn and understand more fully what is asked of us all in response to the abuse crisis.

The research participants and methods

The approach to the main part of the research was qualitative, which means we listened at length to diverse individual experiences relating to clerical child sexual abuse and its aftermath and worked to interpret what these revealed about culture, habits and practices in the life of the Catholic Church here in England and Wales. We carried out eighty-two interviews and four focus group meetings. Those who took part were:

- Twenty-two survivors of abuse by a priest or a person with authority in a Catholic institutional setting.
- Twenty-five priests and deacons, including 3 priests who had been the subject of allegations, two of whom had returned to ministry, and one who remains on a safeguarding plan.[3]
- Seventeen laypeople, mostly from parishes directly affected by a case of abuse involving a priest they had known, and several young adults with broader experience of the Church. In this group, thirteen were women.
- Two family members of survivors.
- Fourteen professional safeguarding staff, eleven who worked in Catholic institutions and three who worked in secular safeguarding roles.
- Eighteen members of religious communities, ten from male communities, eight from female communities, including some from monastic life. Three of the male religious were brothers, i.e. not ordained; and seven were religious priests.
- Five diocesan bishops.

Some participants fell into more than one category so these figures add up to a greater total than the number of interviews.

The participants in the research were drawn from fourteen of the twenty-two dioceses and sixteen religious orders across England and Wales.

Alongside the interviews, we arranged four focus group meetings in which small groups of laypeople, priests and survivors reflected with us on aspects of their experience in relation to the questions explored in this research. All the interviews and focus group conversations were transcribed and analysed and led to this report.[4] Our analysis also drew on further background provided in conversations with over twenty individuals deeply concerned with these matters within the Church and from wider society.

Our ethical commitments as academic researchers and our awareness of the sensitivity of this research compelled us to take great care about how we approached participants and the commitments we made to them. We have used strong protocols to protect their identities and ensure

full confidentiality. Although we quote extensively from participants' voices throughout this report because they speak more powerfully than anything we can write, the details given about who is speaking are limited to ensure their anonymity is maintained.

As researchers, we have worked to the high academic standards that are expected. But we are also ourselves part of the Catholic community, part of the systems and cultures the research explores. We have tried to balance both an 'inside' and an 'outside' perspective. We are aware that in both settings, each of us brings experience and convictions that influence how we listen and interpret what we hear. Throughout the project, we have tried to be reflexive, to notice where and how we are biased, and to challenge each other when necessary. One of the purposes this report can serve is to invite others to examine their own attitudes and biases in the light of the many voices and reflections it presents. In other words, the report invites conversation and reflection.

Qualitative research of this kind works with perceptions, narratives and emotions and tries to understand and interpret what these mean. Sometimes we know that individuals' perceptions may be limited or inaccurate. But they are still felt and experienced, and that matters. Perceptions raise questions we need to consider. If perceptions about priestly formation seem to be out of date and unaware of what happens in seminaries today, for example, it indicates a gap in communication that is unhelpful. The question we have continually asked is: what is this telling us about ourselves as a Catholic community of faith?

The primacy of survivors

One of the central themes of the research is the importance of learning from survivors of abuse. We are deeply grateful to the survivors who took part in the research. They spoke with generosity and patience and the immense pain and harm they carried was evident. There is a constant dilemma here. The testimony of survivors, including their anger and frustration, reveals how our culture, habits and practices have failed and points to what we need to re-think. Yet it is not their responsibility to work out what should change or how. Neither can anyone expect that any survivor will always be willing to tell their story of abuse. It can bring fresh pain and renewed trauma each time this is sought, especially for those who were not believed as children or as adults, or experienced responses which lacked compassion or justice.

Every survivor's story is unique and they each reach different places in their lives and in whatever healing or resolution has been possible. Some have long ago distanced themselves from the Catholic Church. Others find a place, often on the edges of faith communities, where they can avoid situations and people that do not feel safe. Some remain active in Catholic belonging. Some have discovered a sense of mission in seeking justice and calling to account the institutions that have failed to acknowledge and respond to the abuse that survivors have experienced.

This research has in part been a process of dialogue with survivors about how to work with them in ways that they feel are safe and worthwhile. The organisation Survivors' Voices has a *Charter for Engaging Survivors*

which is a helpful guide in this area.[5] We learned from a survivor-activist the principle that the way we work with survivors should look and feel like the opposite of abuse, otherwise there is a risk that instead of supporting survivors, we make things worse.

The research focus: culture, systems and theology

From the beginning, the purpose of the research was to examine whether and how our culture, systems and structures within the Catholic Church are implicated in how clerical child abuse happened and how the response was handled. This question leads directly to aspects of Catholic teaching and theology, so we consider these too in this report. Throughout the research process, we have spent time in theological reflection on what we were hearing.

This report is theological in two different ways. First, there is almost always a theology in the stories people tell and the action they have taken. Whether they describe their abuse by a priest or their experience of trying to disclose what happened, or they are part of a parish or diocese from which a priest has been convicted of abuse, or indeed a leader confronted by aspects of this crisis, their narratives disclose elements of Christian faith even if for some this was later abandoned. Their stories often reveal the gap between who we are called to be as the Church, and how we fall short in practice. They ask questions of the Church as an institution and as a community of faith; that is, they ask questions of us all.

The second way in which the report is theological is in how we engage explicitly with some of the questions raised and bring these into dialogue with Catholic faith and teaching. It is very clear from this research that the abuse crisis brings into focus some areas where we need to consider change in how we understand or practise aspects of Catholic faith. One area, for example, is concerned with attitudes to priesthood and the tendency to place priests on a pedestal and see them as special and holy, rather than sharing the same humanity as everyone else in the community of faith, prone to weakness and failure just as we all are, albeit with a distinctive ministry of leadership and presiding at sacramental celebration. This tendency is implicated in the experience of many victims who felt unable to disclose their abuse or were not believed when they tried to disclose it. It is also implicated in how laypeople feel unable to challenge priests when they have concerns which need to be raised. If relationships between priests and laypeople lack mutual transparency and accountability, and are characterised by silences and fear of scandal, our collective culture becomes dysfunctional. It also fails to reflect fully the dignity of the baptised and our shared responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. This area is explored further in later chapters.

Some of those who spoke to us described the child abuse crisis as a ‘catalyst’ pointing to what needs to change. In this report we try to indicate some of the areas where there is a need to discover a deeper theological understanding of aspects of Catholic faith and re-think our practices, attitudes and habits accordingly.

Complementary research: a quantitative survey

To enrich the overall picture the research presents, we commissioned a survey to find out more about the attitudes of Catholics who are less directly affected by this issue. Just over 3,000 people responded to a questionnaire. The sample was representative of the demographics of the Catholic population, including both churchgoers and those who do not come to Mass but still identify as Catholics. The survey explores areas such as what people think about how Catholic leaders have handled the abuse crisis and how they see the impact on the reputation of the Church. There is a separate report which presents and discusses the survey findings.

Why this research is needed and what makes it distinctive

This research is focused specifically on the experience of the Catholic community in England and Wales. Our context is different from that of other countries. It is informed by our history, character and culture as well as by the society and politics within which we live. In the last thirty years, wider society in the UK has also had to come to terms with our communal failure to keep children safe in many settings. Legislation has followed, and it has often seemed that both in the Church and in society we are scrambling to keep up, responding to crises rather than pausing for a deeper examination of what needs to change. There is also valid concern that despite many inquiries, reports and reviews, adequate change has not happened or has been too slow. In this context, the purpose of this research is to pause and invite and facilitate deeper reflection and fresh pathways for the Church within its own life and in its social and evangelising mission.

The distinctive feature of this research is the wide range of voices it presents, mostly from within, but also some from beyond, the Catholic community. The picture that emerges is, to use one of Pope Francis' terms, polyhedral.

We look at the reality of the abuse crisis from multiple viewpoints to achieve a 'whole church' perspective in which survivors' voices are particularly significant. This makes for a complex picture; sometimes we listened to opposing versions of situations in which each voice was explaining the truth as they saw and experienced it. This is the reality of an experience such as the child abuse crisis; there is no single story or interpretation which explains everything and we have to puzzle our way forward listening as deeply as we can to as many voices as possible. It was affirming of our approach that as we proceeded, the entire Catholic Church began to explore more deeply what it means to be a synodal Church, one in which mutual listening and discernment are integral to how we live.[7] We discuss later in the report the connection between the 'conversion of hearts' needed in response to the child abuse crisis and the potential that synodality offers to enable us to become a different kind of church.

This research is also needed because there are aspects of the crisis of child abuse in the Catholic context that differentiate it from other contexts. We have become familiar with revelations of abuse in other contexts in recent

Pope Francis,
Evangelii Gaudium

Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked.[6]

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decades; in the world of football and other areas of sport, for example, and in social care settings for children and young people, and less visibly, in families. There are common themes that link child sexual abuse in Catholic settings to these other contexts: the powerlessness of children and the power of adults; the access to children and young people found in such contexts; and the relative impunity created by inadequate systems of oversight and accountability.

Each of these is implicated in how the abuse crisis has unfolded in Catholic contexts, but with further complex dimensions. The power of priests is spiritual as well as practical and the way in which they have been regarded in the past has been part of the problem. The systems by which priests are assigned to parishes or moved are not transparent nor are there any practical ways in which they are accountable to the parishes they serve. But above all, it cannot be a defence to point to the prevalence of abuse elsewhere as a reason to minimise abuse in the Church because we are called by our faith to a different ethic and practice. The Gospel we profess and try to live demands that we protect anyone who is vulnerable and cherish every child. The moral and social teaching of the Church is founded on the dignity of each person and holds out to the world the imperative to enable every person to flourish and reach fulfilment. It is right that the Church has strong safeguarding practices; society expects this and increasingly requires it of all institutions. But we should do more. We should be a model of better response to victims and survivors than is found elsewhere, and of willingness to confront failures and bring about change.

What this research does not cover

Our concern is with how the whole Catholic community has experienced the child abuse crisis. Our approach asks what the impact has been and what this means for our life of faith and our communal discipleship. We have not tried to investigate any particular cases nor to evaluate in any systematic way how policies and procedures have worked or not worked. There are other bodies in the Church responsible for these tasks: diocesan safeguarding offices and at the national level, the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS). Nor have we tried to evaluate whether the new safeguarding structures and standards recently introduced are effective or working well. That would require a different kind of research, probably at a future time. We have not tabulated facts and figures other than presenting a few snapshots from data found elsewhere to give some context and parameters.

There are also themes in our data that we have not covered in this report, mainly because the data was insufficient for a full analysis and discussion. We also wanted to keep the report to a manageable length. Examples include concerns about Catholic teaching on sexuality and celibacy; about how seminaries work and whether priestly formation should be done in different ways; and about how ideals of the Catholic family were implicated in how abuse happened.

One significant absence in this report is that we have not interviewed offenders, priests who have been convicted of abuse and removed

The Gospel we profess and try to live demands that we protect anyone who is vulnerable and cherish every child.

from ministry and in some cases, laicised. This is partly due to the difficulty of finding those who might be willing to speak, and partly because such interviewing needs specialised training and skills. But we acknowledge that their voices matter too. We have learned a great deal from the skilled and expert research listening to offenders carried out in Ireland by Dr Marie Keenan and elsewhere by Dr Brendan Geary FMS.

Dr Marie Keenan's research

Dr Marie Keenan is an Irish psychotherapist and academic who has worked with priests who have abused children. In 2011, she published *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power and Organizational Culture,* (OUP, 2011) a book in which she analysed how and why priests become perpetrators of abuse. Keenan's work is based on in-depth interviews and group work with seven priests and two religious brothers, of whom seven had been convicted of abuse (in the other two other cases, the victims did not wish to press charges), all of whom were taking part in treatment programmes. She examines her subjects' experience and perceptions against a background of wide-ranging theoretical perspectives taking in the culture and systems in which they entered seminaries and what they experienced during formation and subsequent ministry. She situates her research in the context of Catholicism in Ireland and presents a critical review of the response of the Irish Church and of the Pope and the Holy See to the abuse crisis. Her discussion covers themes related to power, sexuality, celibacy and masculinity.

Keenan aimed to discover from the men themselves how they made sense of their lives and what they understood about their sexual abuse of children. She acknowledged that their accounts were subjective, located 'somewhere between objective fact and subjective remembering'. (p.259) She noted too that other parts of the story of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church 'are as yet unlanguaged, much less understood'. (p.259) She concluded: 'When the individual and the institutional dimensions of the problem are brought together what becomes evident is how the individual perpetrators, the bishops and religious leaders, the lower-ranking clergy and the Catholic laity are inter-connected in a web of interacting dynamics and relationships that contributed to the evolution and maintenance of the problem.' (p.260)

Keenan's multi-layered work reinforces a principle that underpins this research, that abuse cannot be explained only by focusing on individual offending behaviour. There are cultural, contextual and systemic factors which also act powerfully and must be included in a full understanding of how priests come to abuse children. Although her work relates primarily to the specific Irish Catholic context, it offers extensive insights to other contexts and has provided a significant reference point for the Boundary Breaking research.

2. The context

The abuse crisis as happening in the past and continuing in the present

When survivors spoke to us, they described the impact of the abuse on their lives and the further impact of how they were treated when they tried to disclose what had happened to them and seek acknowledgement and response. Although for most survivors, the abuse happened many decades ago – sometimes forty or even fifty years ago – the aftermath continues. As the research progressed, we became aware that the aftermath – the failures in how the Church responded to victims and survivors – was as important and revealing as the fact that the original abuse happened. Although much has changed in the Church since their abuse took place, including the introduction and strengthening of safeguarding practices, there is still a great deal more to do. Some of the ways survivors have experienced inadequate or harmful responses from Catholic institutions or office-holders when they have sought acknowledgement and redress have happened in very recent years. Many survivors still lack confidence that the Church as an institution has truly understood all the dimensions of what has failed and the further pain caused by mishandling.

In listening to, and interpreting, the voices of research participants, we have been mindful of the historical past and of the changes and evolutions which have taken place from the 1960s onwards, and more specifically from the mid-1990s when explicit safeguarding policies and practices were introduced in dioceses and parishes here. We also note that Catholic institutions such as dioceses and religious communities and schools have experienced different levels of incidence of clerical abuse and their leaders and professional staff have responded in different ways. It is not possible to generalise very far, and it matters to be aware of timing and of each institutional context.

What matters even more is that we are all part of one body; we cannot behave as though it does not matter if the abuse or mishandling is less prevalent in our own parish, diocese or community when across our broader Catholic community there are multiple cases and unknown numbers of victims and survivors.

The wider context

There are many books and reports that describe and analyse changes in wider social awareness of child abuse in the last 50 years. This report does not review or discuss the wider UK social and policy context, although we acknowledge its influence on how the Catholic Church has become aware of its own failures to prevent abuse or protect children and others who are vulnerable. One useful resource to understand the wider context is a report prepared for the statutory inquiry into child abuse, IICSA, which is available to download.

Jo Lovett, Maddy Coy, and Liz Kelly, Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University, *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment* (IICSA, 2018).

https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/research/social-political-discourses.html

Facts and figures about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

It is difficult to gain an accurate picture of the extent of child abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales as there has been no comprehensive independent report of the kind that has happened in other countries.[8]

The first national office charged with responsibility for safeguarding policy and practice in the Catholic Church, the Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (COPCA), was set up in 2002. In 2008, following the Cumberlege review, this gave way to a new structure, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS), governed by the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC). The Commission published annual reports which provide some data about safeguarding progress and about allegations, but this is limited in scope. The last report was published in 2020, giving more detailed data than previously. No reports have yet been published from the successor agency, the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA). The NCSC reports provide the following overview.

- Between 2001 and 2015, fifty-five priests were laicised as a result of investigations into sexual abuse.[9]
- By 2019, there were 479 safeguarding plans in place, with around ninety to one hundred new plans put in place each year from 2014-2019.[10]
- Between 2003 and 2012, 465 allegations of sex abuse had been reported to the statutory civil authorities.
- In its 2018 report covering the previous year, the Commission handled 156 child related allegations against 125 individuals, of which 104 concerned sexual abuse and six concerned child abuse images.[11]
- In its report on the year 2019, the NCSC recorded that 161 individuals had allegations of abuse against children raised against them, an increase of 29 per cent compared to 2018.[12] Of the alleged perpetrators, half were diocesan or religious priests, brothers or deacons. The majority of allegations related to sexual abuse, grooming or possessing indecent images of children. The other allegations related to emotional, physical and other forms of abuse.

There is no information available about how many of these allegations related to historic cases and how many were related to recent or current experience. Nor is there any data about how many cases resulted in convictions.

A further statistical overview covering a longer period from 1970-2015 was commissioned by CSAS and carried out by Dr Stephen Bullivant.[13] This review only covered sexual abuse of children under eighteen in contrast to the reports cited above which also covered other forms of abuse. The Bullivant report notes that the data drawn from records held by Catholic institutions is limited and incomplete, but still valuable. His report provides the following summary facts and figures.

- Covering the period from 1970-2015, records exist of 931 separate complaints of child sexual abuse reported to Catholic authorities covering 3,072 instances of alleged abuse. Of these, around 63 per cent were to dioceses and 37 per cent were to religious orders. 1,753 individuals came forward to make complaints.
- The number of complaints made in each year was low (fewer than 20) until 1995, then rose in subsequent years peaking at eighty-four in 2010. The complaints related to incidents said to have occurred an average of 26 years previously.
- The data shows comparatively high levels of alleged abuse in the 1960s and 1970s which are 'broadly consistent' with research evidence from the USA.[14]
- In total, 81 per cent of complaints of child sexual abuse received by Catholic institutions were reported to statutory authorities.
- In the same period, there were 177 prosecutions of offenders resulting in 133 convictions.[15]

Bullivant and other researchers concur that a large proportion of abuse is never reported to the police or other authorities, and when it is reported, this often happens many years later. Our data and conversations with survivors confirm this pattern. It is highly likely that there are many more cases of abuse where the victims have not disclosed what has happened to them or made allegations to any authorities.

The Church has been learning to respond

The experience of the Catholic Church in relation to clerical child abuse is still unfolding here in England and Wales and in the global Catholic community to which we belong. There have been different phases of this process. At first, as cases of child abuse involving priests became known, often through exposure in the media, the emphasis was on the rapid development of safeguarding policies and procedures. Later, other priorities presented fresh challenges: the need to consider the impact on priests who have not offended but feel that they are under suspicion; coming to terms with how cases had been mishandled by Catholic institutions both in previous decades and still continuing; and the realisation that the Church lacked adequate procedures for investigating bishops who had either offended or had failed to deal adequately with allegations within their jurisdictions, often protecting alleged abusers. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to work with and learn from survivors, some of whom became active in advocacy on these issues.[16]

In England and Wales, it is now thirty years since the Catholic bishops and the wider Catholic community began to realise and recognise the scale and impact of child sexual abuse involving clergy. The steps that have been taken at national and diocesan level in response are far from the whole story, but they indicate continuing efforts to understand the harm and tackle the change needed.

- The first response of the bishops after the crisis became visible in the early 1990s was to develop policies and practices to protect children and vulnerable adults. *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines* was published in 1994 by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW). Every diocese was expected to adopt and implement policies to protect children and to appoint diocesan officers to ensure this happened.
- In 1996, the Bishops' Conference published *Healing the Wound of Child Sexual Abuse: A Church Response*, a report from an expert working party which explained the impact of abuse, discussed the factors involved and explored how to provide an effective and compassionate pastoral response.
- In 2000, following a high profile case in which the Archbishop of Westminster's handling of a priest known to be an abuser was criticised, the Archbishop asked Lord Nolan to conduct a review of the policies and structures then in place. This led to the Nolan Report, *A Programme for Action*, which recommended the establishment by the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Office for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (COPCA). This was set up in 2002 as an independent agency with professional staff funded by the National Catholic Fund.
- A further review took place in 2007 as recommended by Lord Nolan and chaired by Baroness Cumberlege. The 2007 report, *Safeguarding with Confidence: Keeping Children and Vulnerable Adults Safe in the Catholic Church*, proposed 're-balancing' the role of COPCA and gave it a new name, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS). It also set in place the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission

The One Church approach

The Nolan Report recommended that the whole Church in England and Wales, including individual bishops and religious superiors, should commit themselves to 'a single set of policies, principles and practices' concerning safeguarding. These should be expressed in parish, diocesan and national structures and personnel, and provided with adequate resources. In this understanding, 'One Church' is expressed in unified structures and policies. Later, the Elliott Review added a theological foundation, which is explained below.

(NCSC) to focus on strategy and governance and recommended renewed commitment to the 'One Church' approach and the development of codes of conduct for priests, deacons, religious and others who work in the Church.

- In 2015, the Conference of Religious of England and Wales published *Integrity in Ministry: A Document of Principles and Standards for Religious in England and Wales*. This is still widely used.[17]

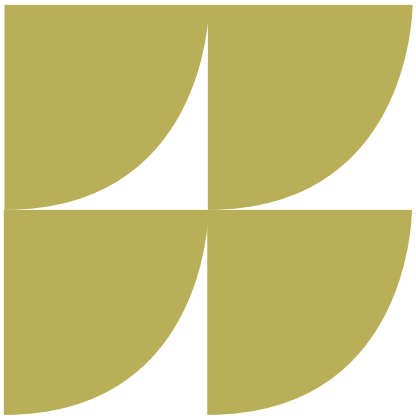
- In May 2019, the spring plenary meeting in Valladolid of the Bishops' Conference, their regular in-service training meeting, focused on safeguarding. The training team included members of the CSAS Survivors' Advisory Panel and other survivors of sexual abuse. The purpose of the training was to help the bishops to understand more fully the importance of listening to and accompanying those who have been abused and the long-term effects of abuse.

- The Elliott Review was commissioned in 2019 by the Bishops' Conference to examine again the structures and arrangements for safeguarding in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.[18] This review, which reported in 2020, took place alongside the government's statutory inquiry (IICSA), which is explained below. The Elliott Review recommended further revision of the structures which shape and govern safeguarding policy and practice in the dioceses and communities of male and female religious of England and Wales. It also laid out a theological rationale:

  > ***... if we harm the dignity of anyone, and most especially those who have the least power amongst us, we harm the dignity of the Body of Christ itself. In this light, as the People of God, our response to abuses of power, abuses of conscience, or abuses of any kind, should, in the words of Pope Francis, be one of solidarity, a combined and unified response which harnesses the gifts and talents of all parts of the Church, all parts, that is, of the Body of Christ.***
  >
  > ***This solidarity in safeguarding must involve an active participation of all the members of the People of God, it must involve us acting together – in a meaningful and constructive way – as one Church, as one people in his Body.[19]***

- The revised national agency recommended by the Elliott Review, the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) began work in 2021-2022 and acts as a professional standards body with regulatory powers and a fully independent governing body. Alongside the CSSA, a partner agency, the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) provides advice, training and support services to religious communities.[20]

- The Elliott Review also proposed the establishment of a National Tribunal Service (NTS) to address 'canonical matters connected to clergy discipline and canonical offences'.[21] Launched in November 2023 after approval from the Vatican, it is described as expressing 'the commitment of the Church in England and Wales to promote and encourage consistent and fair practice in the determination of penal cases in accordance with the law of the Church, and so to foster confidence in a just outcome for all those involved'.[22]



- In 2020, the Bishops' Conference published *Caring Safely for Others: Pastoral Standards and Safe Conduct in Ministry*, a theologically based code of conduct for those involved in ordained ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.[23]
- In 2019, an annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse was established. It had first been proposed by a survivor to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM) and was then established by Pope Francis who invited participation from the whole Catholic Church. In England and Wales, a group commissioned by the Bishops' Conference, originally called the Let's Be Honest Group and now known as the Isaiah Journey Group, produces resources to assist parish learning, reflection and prayer on and around the Day of Prayer.[24]
- A related pattern of development has taken place in the dioceses and religious communities of England and Wales. Dioceses first began to appoint child protection co-ordinators in the 1990s, later revising the role to adopt safeguarding terminology. At first, many were priests but gradually there was a shift to employing professional safeguarding staff with experience in fields such as social work and criminal justice, and setting up diocesan offices. Religious communities initially either established their own safeguarding commissions or participated in a regional body. Later they began to appoint their own professional safeguarding officers or shared resources with each other.
- At parish level, the role of parish safeguarding representative has become well established. These are volunteers who ensure that appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service checks are in place and that safeguarding policies are followed. According to the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission's 2019 report, 96 per cent of 2,181 parishes have a safeguarding representative.[25]

Whilst all these developments are necessary and have made a difference at every level, they do not in themselves generate the conversion of hearts across the whole Catholic community which Pope Francis calls for. Nor do they probe the habits and practices within the culture of our local Church that need to be changed in the light of what we learn about ourselves from this crisis.

Abuse in the global Catholic Church and the response of the Pope and his offices

A similar process of change has taken place at the level of the Holy See. Successive waves of crisis and scandal relating to child abuse and institutional Catholic denial, cover-up and mishandling have been reported in countries across the world and continue to emerge. These events have asked severe questions of Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis. Both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have sometimes faltered in response and sometimes acted to recognise the scale of harm and the change that is needed. Both have made statements of heartfelt contrition and sadness. Both have met with and listened to survivors. Pope Francis continues to do this. Steps have been taken

to amend aspects of canon law that categorised child abuse in deeply unhelpful ways. It was offensive to many that abuse was seen in canon law as a crime against chastity. This has now changed to treating child abuse as a crime against human dignity.

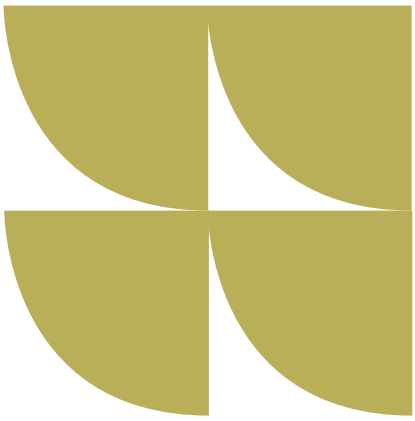
In 2019, Pope Francis issued a new Church law titled *Vos estis lux mundi*, which outlines specific processes for investigating and reporting child sexual abuse, including allegations against bishops. It also requires all parts of the Church to follow the laws in their own country in relation to reporting abuse.[26] *Vos estis* also explicitly defines clerical sexual abuse and requires local churches to set up easily accessible systems through which anyone can report abuse.

In 2021, Pope Francis issued a revised version of Book VI of the *Code of Canon Law*, the section which deals with sanctions and penalties. The changes specify that sexual abuse, grooming of children for sex, possessing child pornography and failing to report abuse are criminal offences in canon law. They also recognise that adults as well as children can be victims, especially if there is an imbalance of power or a vulnerability. Priests can be dismissed from the clerical state if found guilty of these offences. Canon law also now tells bishops and leaders of religious communities that they 'must' rather than 'can' punish offenders.

Although these steps are welcome, it is clear from this research as well as from wider commentary and from survivors' perceptions that there is still much to be done to establish greater confidence in the leadership of the Pope and offices that support his ministry. Although Pope Francis set up the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM) as a body within papal structures through which survivors advised the Pope and Holy See, that body has experienced many difficulties and resignations.[27] This research has not explicitly focused on the role of the Holy See, but neither can the context of the Catholic Church England and Wales be separated from what happens there.

The Catholic Church and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

Wider society in the UK has also experienced a constant stream of revelations about child sexual abuse in multiple institutions and sectors. In response, in 2016 the government set up an independent statutory inquiry known as IICSA. Its task was to investigate where and how institutions such as children's homes, local authorities and faith-based institutions had failed to protect children in their care. The Inquiry gathered evidence through fifteen investigations which generated nineteen reports. Several of these investigations focused on Catholic institutions, including case studies on Ampleforth, Downside and St Benedict's Ealing schools and their connected monasteries within the English Benedictine Congregation, and also Birmingham Archdiocese. A report on child protection in the Catholic Church in England and Wales as a whole was published in November 2020, *Safeguarding in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales*.[28] This overarching report considered policies, leadership and canon law as well as reviewing whether the Nolan and Cumberlege reviews of child protection had improved policy and practice.



The report was critical of the Catholic Church, finding that it 'has put its own reputation above the welfare of children for decades' and 'repeatedly failed to support victims and survivors, while taking positive action to protect alleged abusers'. The report concluded that

> ***While there have undoubtedly been improvements in the Church's response to child sexual abuse, based on the evidence we heard, Church leaders need to do more to encourage and embed a culture of safeguarding throughout the entire Catholic Church in England and Wales.***[29]

Its recommendations covered leadership, mandatory training, the need for stronger systems to ensure compliance with safeguarding policy including external auditing, and changes to canon law. The Bishops' Conference welcomed the reports from the Inquiry and accepted the recommendations made.[30]

The final section of Chapter Three in this report explores how our research participants experienced the IICSA process and its impact. Overall, it was a mixed experience for the Catholic Church institutionally and for victims and survivors abused within Catholic institutions. For victims and survivors, a number of whom gave evidence, it was a place where they felt listened to, which brought comfort and validation. Crucially, survivors who spoke to this research felt better supported by IICSA than by the Church. Both in the Truth Project, a complementary process to the Inquiry itself in which survivors could tell their stories to trained supportive listeners, and in the formal Inquiry hearings, survivors experienced having a voice that they were denied in the Church.

The experience of the Catholic Church's internal life being investigated in a statutory inquiry is notable in another way. The institutional Church has always defended its freedom to organise its own life according to its teachings and beliefs. In England and Wales, the history of penal times and anti-Catholicism continuing well into the twentieth century have deepened this defensive tendency. At the same time, in its public voice, the Church has asserted moral and social principles that should guide political choices and policies and has sought to participate in building a good society through practical social action and in its educational institutions. It is uncomfortable for any institution to have its internal systems exposed as having serious failings. It is humbling to submit to external scrutiny that happens because of a failure to live according to the principles espoused in public. This experience has changed the positioning of the Catholic Church in relation to wider society in ways that are still unfolding.

3. About reading this report: Explaining some key terms

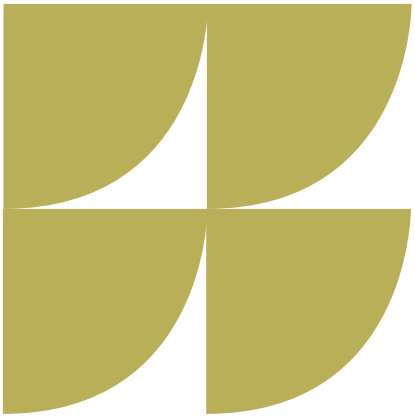
Child abuse crisis

We use the term 'child abuse crisis' or 'abuse crisis' throughout the report as a shorthand way of referring to a complex and multi-layered reality affecting the whole church, in its institutions and office-holders as well as its communities and individual members. It has disadvantages: 'crisis', for example, suggests something short-lived, boundaried and exceptional, which is not the case here. Sexual abuse has almost certainly always happened in the Church, but its prevalence has come to light in the last 50 years and challenged fundamental aspects of how we perceive the Church and its ordained ministers. This is an ongoing and profound crisis which asks questions that the Church is still struggling to answer. We understand the crisis as including the sexual abuse which has happened and all the ways in which the Church, in its institutions, leaders and communities, has struggled or failed to respond adequately. This latter dimension includes what we have termed 'mishandling', which is explained below.

Victims and survivors

The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' that we use to refer to and quote those who have experienced abuse are also unsatisfactory in some ways. We do not always know whether individuals feel comfortable with either or both terms. We recognise that those who have experienced abuse may feel that a label has been attached to their voices which 'others' them, especially since the text frequently uses 'we' to mean the Catholic community (although 'we' sometimes means just the research team). Some survivors are still part of the Catholic community; others are not, as a later chapter explores.

Each individual to whom we have listened is far more than a victim or survivor; they have families and friends and professional lives like anyone else. Neither can they be regarded as a having a single voice. Rather, each person's perceptions, experiences and motivations are unique and all have enriched this research. But for ease of reading, some descriptor is necessary. We have avoided the double usage of 'victim-survivor' simply for readability. In general, we have used the term 'survivor' because most of the report concerns how people experienced what happened after the abuse and how they see their lives and experience now. We have sometimes used the term 'victim' when referring to the abuse events. In Chapter Two, there is a section of the report that explores the process of 'becoming a survivor' but this is a limited perspective of an area that needs more research.



Mishandling

We use the term 'mishandling' to refer to failures or weaknesses in how Catholic Church authorities and institutions responded and continue to respond to those who make disclosures or allegations of abuse. It also applies to how allegations were handled, including how alleged and convicted offenders are treated. So 'mishandling' includes:

- covering up abuse by, for example, moving priests to a different parish or school, or to another diocese or even a different country;
- denial that abuse has happened or minimising its impact;
- refusal to believe victims;
- a lack of compassion or of justice in response to victims;
- procedural and administrative mistakes in handling of cases;
- absence or slowness of response;
- a lack of transparency;
- responding only after significant external pressure from the media or other sources.

Mishandling also applies to how parish communities are treated when they are affected by a case either directly or indirectly.

We consider victims' and survivors' experience of mishandling in Chapter Two, and parish communities' experience in Chapter Three. In Chapter Five, we discuss positive responses and experiences and the progress being made to move beyond the kinds of mishandling listed above.

Those who described experiences of mishandling included survivors and also lay people, priests and bishops, safeguarding professionals and religious women and men. Most related to cases of abuse that took place decades ago, but several are still continuing or have come to closure only in the last few years. It is evident that mishandling still continues to happen in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

The different groups that make up the Church

There are other dilemmas in choosing the best language to talk about the groups that have participated in this research. It is commonplace to talk about 'laypeople', but that is a negative definition based on what we are not, that is, not ordained. A positive definition is 'the baptised' or 'the faithful'; but those terms also include the ordained. We have used a variety of terms, including 'people' and 'parish members' alongside occasional use of the descriptor 'lay'. Whenever we use the term 'woman', we have usually omitted the term 'lay', because women in the Catholic Church can only be 'lay', that is, they cannot be ordained. Where the women speaking are religious, members of religious communities, the text indicates this.

We have also mostly preferred to use 'priests' rather than 'clergy', although both terms are commonplace in the Church in this country. 'Clergy' is a sociological description, whereas 'priest' is a theological term, as are 'deacon' and 'bishop'.[31] The extensive reliance on the term 'priest' in English and Welsh Catholic culture may have disadvantages, as later chapters of this report indicate. Terms such as 'pastor' are used elsewhere but are unfamiliar here.

We have also used a range of terms to cover leaders or office-holders, who might include bishops, parish priests, diocesan trustees, provincial or local leaders of religious communities, diocesan staff and those connected with Catholic safeguarding structures including their trustees and professional staff. Some sections of the report are specific in referring to the office-holders concerned. The sections dealing with bishops name them as such, for example. Sometimes the broader and less specific term 'office-holders' or equivalents such as 'leaders' are used, usually in order to protect the anonymity of the person speaking. Some research participants work in, or have worked in, highly specific posts or tasks and we have avoided any risk that they could be identified.

In describing the structures and roles within religious life, we use 'congregation' and 'order' interchangeably to refer to the larger international body to which an individual belongs, and 'monastery' or 'local community' or 'religious community' to refer to the particular units in which people live. We also talk about provincial leaders and local leaders; province size varies and may cover the UK or may include other countries. Sometimes we do not describe whether the leader is male or female in order to protect anonymity. In some religious communities, the leader is termed 'the superior', and that term appears here sometimes in material from the data.

'The Church'

We have reflected frequently during the research about how the term 'the Church' is used. All our participants used this term, although it is often not clear what precise meaning they wish to convey. 'The Church' can mean the institutional structures and office-holders; or it can mean what we have sometimes described in this research as 'the whole Church', the communities of faith and many other groups and individuals with various degrees of belonging and identity as well as the institutional structures and office-holders without which they would not be gathered and visible. This matters because different parts of the Church have experienced the abuse crisis in distinct and specific ways, as this report explains.

Theologically, the Church is both these human and institutional realities and the sacramental presence of Christ in and for the salvation of the world; but it is hard to know whether that what people mean when they use the term. The term is used a great deal in the quotations from the data presented in the report and readers will need to interpret the likely meaning for themselves. We have tried to take some care in using the term in the narrative and analysis. But we recognise that meanings slide and that precise definition each time would make the text wearying to read.

4. We can be better than this

We offer this report to the whole Catholic community, both to those within that community who have been directly affected by the abuse crisis and those who are less directly affected but who listen to the continuing revelations of abuse in Catholic settings and grieve for the victims and survivors and for the wider harm done. We hope people who have not previously found themselves thinking about these issues may read it. And we hope that all those who could be described as office-holders in the Church – priests, deacons, lay ministers, diocesan staff, leaders of religious communities and lay organisations, bishops, trustees – will find it illuminating because of the voices it presents and the portrait it paints of the whole Church.

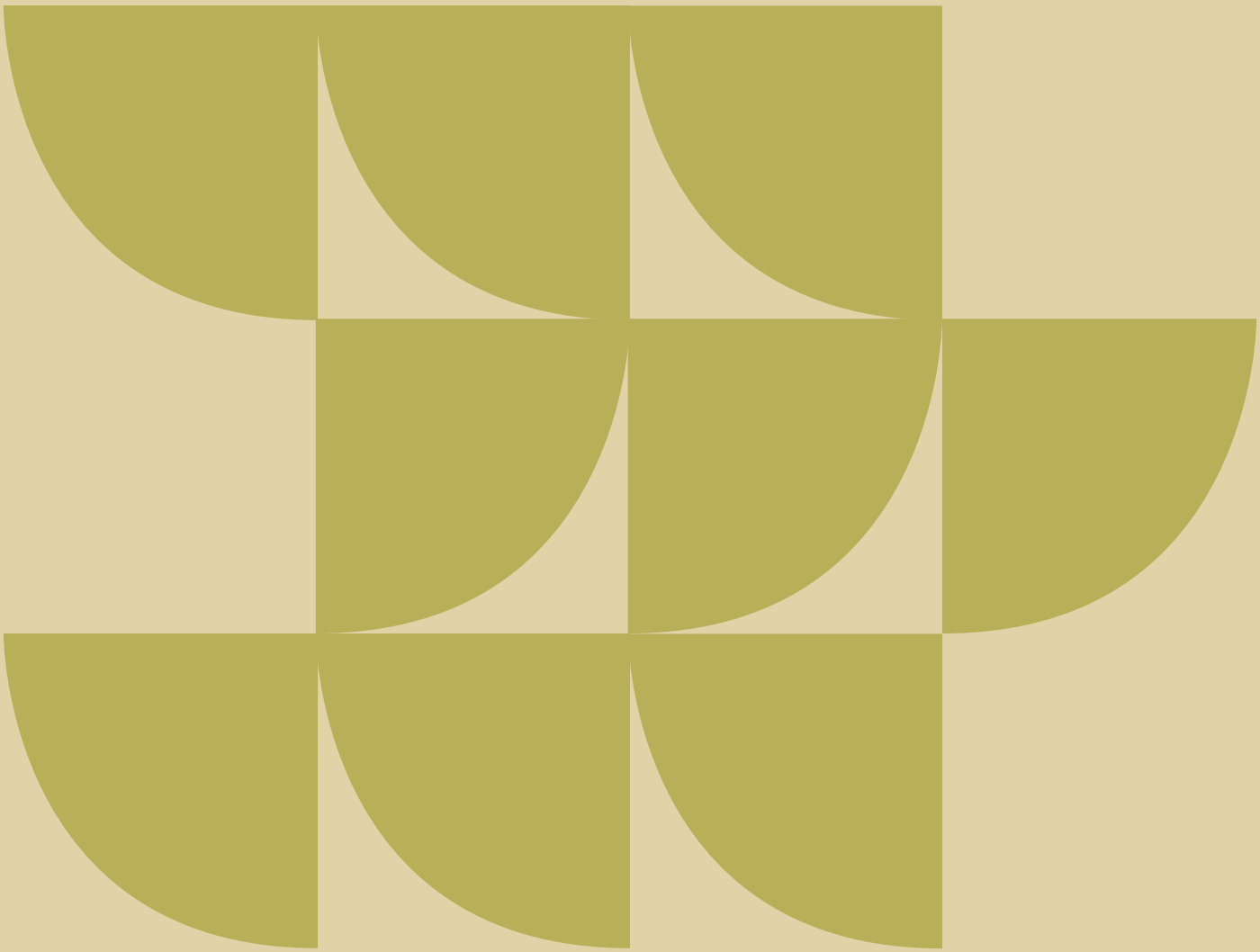
We also hope survivors will read it and find something of value. Since it examines cultures, systems and theology, it is not a direct response to the concerns many express about their experience. Rather, it is concerned with other processes of change which we believe are needed so that the whole Church understands and learns from what has gone wrong and can find ways forward.

It is not easy to read a report which explores experiences of failure, harm and betrayal in Catholic life. Some readers, particularly among office-holders, will already be weary because there have been so many reports and much other literature on this subject. They have also absorbed multiple requirements at every level for action and response. Some live with uneasy and imperfect situations constrained in various ways that they cannot control.

Although this was difficult research to undertake, it was evident as we reflected on what we have heard that there are restorative and redemptive pathways we can take as a community of faith. There are resources of courage, insight and generosity to be found, and there is potential and willingness to learn, to lament, to be reconciled and to enact justice. The Church will be better if we take these paths.

Chapter Two

Listening to survivors



1. Introduction

Most of the twenty-two survivors who spoke to us had been sexually abused as children by priests or religious brothers. Two were abused by other authority figures in Catholic family and school settings. Almost all had already shared their stories, some publicly, some with supportive professionals, most with Church representatives of some kind. Several were among those who agreed to participate in our research because of their particular role or ministry and then disclosed during our conversations that they had also experienced abuse. In the interviews, we did not ask participants to recall their abuse or narrate what happened to them, but some chose to do so. Our intention was to understand the impact of abuse and to hear about how Catholic authorities and institutions responded to victims and handled the allegations.

Inviting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to be interviewed for research purposes is contentious. Some survivors who declined to speak to us felt that research such as this risked using survivors in an extractive way so that the Church might benefit. They feel that the Church as an institution is an offender and that research such as this project has no right to contact survivors or to ask them to speak.[32] In their perspective, the Church cannot be trusted and they will not engage. We acknowledge that viewpoint and hope that at some point a dialogue may be possible.

Research in this area needs to be carried out with ethical sensitivity. We were aware of the cost of the conversations into which we invited victims and survivors and the potential for further harm through triggers and re-traumatisation. Those who spoke to the research have all done so in full knowledge of the possible implications for them and of the ways in which their contributions will be used and the ethical commitments on which the research is based. Many have said that they want to do this work not so much to help the Church but to ensure that what happened to them does not happen to other children in today's Catholic institutions.

Many survivors of child sexual abuse were robbed of their voice often before they knew how to speak. We hope that this project has helped some survivors find ways to speak and extended the reach of others who have already spoken in other settings. Survivors' voices are heard especially in this chapter, which will not be easy for many to read. They also speak in later chapters, especially in Chapter Five which presents more positive aspects of their testimony and experience, and of how the Church has responded.

Each survivor's experience and perspective is unique. Each voice matters. We know that the survivors with whom we have worked in this research represent only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more in these two countries who choose not to come forward, be identified or respond to requests for interview. It is all the more important to listen with deep attention to those who are willing to speak.

Each survivor's experience and perspective is unique. Each voice matters.

2. The impact of sexual abuse

The sexual abuse of children causes deep anguish, fear, guilt and shame in those abused. It can undermine their sense of who they are and disrupt the development of self-worth and self-confidence at the point when these should be embedded in the self. The damage can be long-lasting; many live with the effects all their lives. A survivor, now in his sixties, who was sexually abused by male religious at school, told us: ***'I get by but it's, it's not by any means a happy, oh right I'd say, there's certainly happiness that's in it, but it's not by any means a fulfilled life'.*** Another spoke of how the abuse he suffered had severely damaged the self-worth and dignity he should feel and that ***'it would take a lifetime, if ever, to recover half of that self-worth.'*** Participants told how they tried to fight against these effects, so that the impact of abuse did not define them. ***'I want to be, hold it without being bitter or, you know, it's how to integrate it really. How to feel that it's not holding me, that I'm, it happened but it doesn't have control'***, said a female survivor.

Survivors explained how their abuse had affected all areas of their lives. It had harmed their education and subsequent life-chances; their relationships and their capacity for sexual and emotional intimacy; their physical and mental health and their family life. They spoke of having difficulties at school and of deteriorating academic records following their abuse: ***'Things really did come off the rails'***, one survivor said. Another became ***'petrified of school'. 'I used to wake up in terror'***, he added. Others described how having been abused made them more vulnerable to bullying and other forms of abuse at school. Some spoke of being unable to complete university degrees, not being able to hold down a job, or not succeeding in their chosen career.

In their personal lives and relationships, some survivors have struggled with their sexuality. Some described a series of broken relationships or being unable to trust others and build long-lasting stable relationships. A male survivor who had never married felt ***'I've failed in relationships'.*** Another described how he ***'couldn't bear to hold hands'***. ***'I just knew in my mind I'd got an issue and I'd had an issue ever since it happened really.'*** Survivors also spoke of other emotional and psychological impacts including nervous breakdowns, alcoholism and attempted suicides.

We learned that the person abused is not the only one who suffers. The effects of abuse are felt keenly by family members. One survivor spoke of the impact of his mood swings on his wife. Some survivors described how they held back from disclosing their abuse to protect their parents and because they wanted to avoid undermining their faith in the Church. Some had never told their partners; a survivor who recently lost his wife of nearly fifty years talked of how that he had never told her what had taken place in junior seminary, but after speaking with us, he decided to tell his children. The impact can also be intergenerational. The daughter of a survivor described her mother's reaction to learning some time after her parents' divorce that her father had been abused: ***'she then had a lot of guilt, because she now thinks she should have known...and it's so***

A survivor, now in his sixties, who was sexually abused by male religious at school, told us: 'I get by but it's, it's not by any means a happy, oh right I'd say, there's certainly happiness that's in it, but it's not by any means a fulfilled life'.

obvious now, when you look back, and she didn't know, she feels guilty that she didn't ask'. She continued

> *There definitely is a knock-on effect, absolutely, I know that I, myself have mental health issues because of things I've seen, because of things I've heard, because of the way my dad was, and I'm not blaming my dad in any way, I don't mean that, but I just know that it's affected me and my relationships.*

She recalled how her father was overly protective of them as children and spoke of how she too now finds touch and intimacy difficult.

Alongside these painful experiences, we also heard testimonies of survival. The survivors who participated in this research described what they had achieved in their lives, in successful professional careers and in family life. Friendships in particular were vital. But they each described how the abuse was always present, even during many years in which they buried the memory or when they eventually found the right relationship. In the words of one survivor: *'We have a granddaughter and life is good, life is, well, I say it's good, the trauma to do with [the site of abuse] still goes on.'*

There are misconceptions and ill-informed beliefs about survivors which affected some very deeply. Several spoke of how they carried secret fears arising from their abuse. For example, they may be affected by the widespread assumption that people who have been sexually abused will go on to abuse others themselves.[33] This is untrue. In fact, most survivors who spoke to us were deeply committed to the need to protect other children. The combination of that misconception and a concern for other children had tragic consequences for one survivor of abuse by Benedictine monks at school:

> *I took a decision not to have children. I didn't want to bring children, even though I hadn't faced up yet to what had gone on, I was burying what had gone on; I decided not to have children because I didn't want any child of mine rubbing up against anyone like the predators I'd met. Do I regret that? Yeah. I regret, every time somebody says to me, you'd have made a great father, it kills me inside…I'm terrified because I think, supposing they believe all that stuff about how victims of paedophiles become abusers themselves.*

Another survivor recalled that *'I used to wake up in the mornings and consciously think to myself, is this the day when I'm going to start abusing children, because I was abused?'* There was a turning point for this survivor when a therapist told him that it is not true that victims of abuse are more likely to go on to abuse others. Hearing this released him from the fear that he would abuse his son, and represented *'a massive opening'*, allowing him to start *'thinking about it in a way that I'd never done before.'* It was an important step on the road to healing.

Survivors also spoke about the sense of guilt and shame caused by the abuse. One survivor explained:

> *The big thing for many survivors is that they simply cannot have compassion for that part of themselves because they think it was weak, they think they should have. 'Why did I go back? Why didn't I speak up? Why didn't I do something?' And the answer is, because of a psychological survival mechanism which says 'I'm paralysed, the best way to deal with this is to play dead basically.'*

He described how victims need to ***'re-integrate that part of yourself which didn't actually do anything bad or wrong'***. For this survivor, this means looking outside himself to find resources for healing, resources he found in the passion of Christ.

Another survivor who blamed herself for not resisting her abuser more forcefully explained how this experience interacted with a negative understanding of God that she already held, to inflict even more damage: ***'I saw myself as a bad person, so then I just went to Mass every day to try and make myself good. I thought God couldn't send me to hell if I was going to Mass every day.'*** This is then compounded by a feeling of being 'damaged goods'. Another survivor, a religious sister, said she saw herself as dirty and tainted, which made her question her religious vocation and every day she asked herself whether she was just hiding away. A male survivor saw shaming as a weapon that perpetrators use to maintain power over victims, and so standing up and disclosing ***'removes the means by which they can exert control over their victims'.*** He continued: ***'one of the first ways of doing this is to stand up and be counted and to show your face and say, there is no shame.'***

3. Survivors' experience of mishandling

The trauma of not being believed

All the research participants who had experienced child sexual abuse by a Catholic priest or religious brother had also experienced being treated inadequately by a representative of the Church — its leaders or institutions — when they came forward with an allegation or sought support around a disclosure. We heard many examples of survivors whose disclosures and allegations were met by denial or disbelief or by a lack of compassion for the person and their pain.

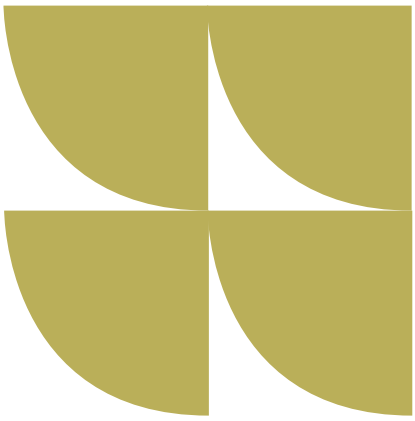
A survivor of abuse in a junior seminary described meetings with leaders of the religious order to which his abuser belonged, in which he spoke of his abuse:

> ***And when they completely disagreed with what I said and, and said I was the first, told me a load of lies, I was the first person ever in the history of the order to complain of any abuse, in any of the schools, in any of the world.***

A female survivor described how the religious order of which her abuser was a member sent a letter of apology but ***'they never bothered to get in touch and see how I was, they never paid for any therapy for me, so as far as I'm concerned, the letter of apology is an admission of guilt, so they don't care'***.

Another male survivor described a meeting with a bishop in which he described his abuse and recalled the bishop's response:

> ***It's a shame that you weren't over eighteen, I'd quite like to reconcile you with [the abusing priest]. I have no statutory authority to do anything about it. I then said, why on earth could this happen? and he***



responded, Well, we're all human. That was his response, well we're all human, even priests, and unfortunately, at that meeting, I was a bit shocked.

For many survivors, the most painful part of disclosing and seeking acknowledgement and support was the experience of not being believed. Several described what happened when they approached office-holders or community leaders. One survivor who had been abused by a priest known to have been responsible for abusing other children described what happened when he finally managed to meet the priest responsible for safeguarding in his diocese:

He kept hinting, you know, have I been well all my life? Did I imagine things, and that was infuriating because it was as though it was, somebody had, pushing a knife in to provoke me.... And he sat down and he said, are you sure that you didn't imagine this?

After hearing this five or six times, the survivor's hope that 'something's going to happen' crumbled. Instead he felt:

negativity being prodded in, that the Church are, you can't get into us, we've got a shield around us, and none of those things go on or, if they do go on, we're not letting anybody know that they go on. We're going to protect.

He described his pain: *'What happens is, you want belief more than anything or any financial compensation, before anything whatsoever, for somebody to say that they believe you means everything'*.

Other reactions which victims experienced involve minimising what had happened. Several participants described wider attitudes that indicated a cultural pattern in Catholic institutions of denying or minimising abuse. In one example, a priest who was also a survivor described talking to a colleague whose predecessor in a different parish had been convicted of abuse and hearing the colleague say *'I don't know what all the fuss was about. He was sixteen, it was just a bit of masturbation.'*

Using spirituality to silence victims

Some survivors were told that they should accept what had happened to them and, in the traditional phrase, 'offer it up'. One female survivor was told *'that I needed to just take up my cross and suffer, suffer gladly'.* A religious brother spoke about a case in which a female survivor whom he described as *'too wounded to trust anybody'* had been told *'Oh, you should forgive'.* He had taken up her case, believing that the mishandling she described could not possibly have happened. He described what happened next:

When I contacted [the diocesan] safeguarding, that certainty was banished. It felt like they did know about it, and ... there was not clear that they were going to do anything about it, if I told them. And my discourse had been, of course, I'm going to support you, we're going to talk to safeguarding. It's not possible that we can tell them about this and they don't do anything about it. And I've lost that confidence.

Sometimes a spiritualised response was used to suggest or insinuate denial. The male survivor who described being prodded and provoked

explained how at the end of their meeting, the priest took him into his church;

> ***And he stood there and he goes, 'I think, I think we'll just say a prayer for you now.' And [a friend] who was with me, said, 'Isn't this where it all started, at these prayers?' And he just never took any notice and he just said, 'Lord, if these, if this really happened to [name] or if it did not happen, we pray for him and hope that he, his mind, gets better.' I'm thinking, you know, it's just like, I didn't think at the time, it was like a cover up.***

Poor procedures

Several survivors' experience of mishandling also concerned what they experienced as inadequate responses or procedures involving safeguarding staff or leaders in Catholic institutions. One male survivor described writing to a number of bishops and archbishops about his abuse, copying in others, and whilst some replied, others did not. Slowness of response from office-holders was described by survivors, family members and safeguarding staff. A safeguarding professional expressed concern about how internal processes hamper a pastoral response:

> ***The prime example of that is, a survivor might contact a religious order and it takes them eighteen months to get back to that survivor because they have to go through so many processes and so many things get signed off and they don't talk to the survivor in the first instance.***

A survivor commented bluntly: ***'I mean, on customer service, its crap... that kind of organisational ability is just not there'.***

Another survivor described accessing records of her original disclosure through a Freedom of Information request and finding them ***'a complete eye opener'***; ***'they're not even proper records, they're not in date order'***. Several survivors had found the response they experienced so poor that they sought access to complaints procedures but found these just as unsatisfactory. It is not surprising that some then contacted a solicitor. In one case, we listened to both a survivor's experience and the perspectives of diocesan staff against whom he was raising a complaint. Both were motivated by similar values and concerns yet no resolution had been found. Another male survivor of abuse in a monastic school recounted his experience;

> ***They gas lighted me. In other words, they treated me as though as I was off the rails, because I was refusing to accept their refusal to comply with GDPR. So at that point, I told the lawyers who had represented us at IICSA to sue the school, because I believed that the current management, how shall I put this, even though they used gentler language and they're not as thuggish as previous lay headmasters and bursars, they're just as dangerous.***

Such experiences suggest that when a response to survivors becomes mired in procedures such as those covering complaints, it soon becomes constrained and unsatisfactory. It also risks the survivor further losing fragile trust and confidence that anyone in the institutional structures will respond adequately.

In many instances, we could only hear one side of the story, one account of the impact of mishandling. Some research participants reflected on the difficulties inherent here; survivors may not have communicated as clearly as they think they have, as one religious brother who had advocated for a survivor pondered. Some safeguarding staff may feel they have done all they can within the exact constraints of their responsibilities. There may be explanations for some aspects of mishandling; but that does not mitigate how such experiences extend the impact of abuse for victims.

Mishandling as secondary abuse and injustice

It is clear from survivors' voices that many of these kinds of mishandling are traumatising and damaging. They are accurately described as a secondary form of abuse carried out by the people and institutions who should have listened, believed and supported. A male survivor of abuse which took place in a junior seminary run by a religious order explained this experience:

> *The secondary psychological abuse is... the power of the institution and how the institution treats you, how the institution ignores you, how the institution doesn't want to know you. That is the secondary psychological abuse and that is sometimes harder to deal with because you're not just up against something that's happened a long time ago, who may be dead now, who you can sort of process, you can come to terms with all that in your head, you can talk to someone about that, and put that to one side, put it to bed, if you have to, you're able to do that through, come to terms with it whatever way you can, therapy, talking, counselling, psychoanalysis, whatever. But the secondary abuse tends to, for me anyway, and I believe for others, tends to stay with you and it's harder to deal with because it's in your face all the time. Every day when we don't get acknowledged that, what happened to us, that's secondary abuse. The abuse is every day because we're still waiting an acknowledgement...that's how I understand it.*

The hurt and isolation that victims and survivors have experienced and the complexity of their finding a way to disclosure and healing are deepened by the mishandling that has taken place. The experience of knowing you are not being listened to or not believed is possibly the most harmful of all the forms that mishandling takes. This absence of basic pastoral care from those representing the Church is even more wounding for survivors because despite the abuse, they expected a response of attention and care. A female survivor brought up in a strong Catholic family, explained how she felt every representative of the Church, both lay and ordained, that she approached had let her down:

> *I think if you're already part of the Church, you want a response that makes you feel as though you're kind of being, well, listened to would be the minimum and looked after would be the next step really. I didn't experience either of those.*

Another female survivor who was abused by a religious priest says that her hope and expectation was that someone in the Church would accompany her in the longer term, to help rebuild the damaged trust, but

The secondary psychological abuse is... the power of the institution and how the institution treats you, how the institution ignores you, how the institution doesn't want to know you.

no one has even offered. Instead, she felt kept at arm's length and her allegations dismissed. She now feels unable to trust any priests, not only because of her abuse but because of the mishandling of her allegations and subsequent complaints. It is hard to see how relationships can be rebuilt where trust has been betrayed to such an extent.

A religious sister abused by a Catholic priest as a child, explained to us that she had never told the leaders of her congregation, nor most of her sisters, about what had happened to her, because she didn't trust them to believe her or respect her experience. When asked what she would want from her Superior, she said simply ***'I'd like her to listen and be supportive, not try and fix anything, just to listen and just to say, I'm here if you need me.'***

One survivor, now in his 60s, who was abused by a member of a religious congregation, has fought with the congregation for many years seeking to be believed. He addressed some of the myths and fears people hold in relation to survivors of abuse:

> ***I want them to come forward, sit down and meet with us. I'm not going to get angry with anybody, don't be afraid of us, and I don't want your money, by the way either, that's another thing. I want you to sit in front of me, listen to what I have to say, and say sorry for what happened, and we were wrong to re-abuse you by not meeting you and not coming forward and saying, it happened to you.***

Mishandling is a form of injustice. The Church rightly upholds the demands of justice in many areas of social, economic and political life, and now also in regard to the environment. But there are kinds of injustice that are more personal and less visible but which still deny what is owed to people's dignity and the rights that flow from that dignity. Not being listened to is a form of injustice, a denial of dignity. When procedures are insufficient or responses are slow or information is unclear or withheld, these are also forms of injustice, ways in which people are being treated unfairly. Catholic social teaching holds up a principle known as commutative justice, giving each person what is due to them as a person. This could also be described as 'process justice', treating people in a way that is seen and experienced as being fair. Margaret Farley, a leading Catholic ethicist, argues that in practical terms this means taking account of each person's concrete reality; their needs, vulnerabilities, claims and capacities.[34] If the Church preaches justice, it must also be able to practice it, and to show what it looks like in its own life. The abuse crisis reveals our communal failures to do so.

Not being listened to is a form of injustice, a denial of dignity.

Dealing with negative perceptions and responses

Survivors also encounter negative perceptions of their situation, perceptions that other research participants confirmed as being commonplace in Catholic institutions and communities. One attitude still widely encountered is the belief that victims and survivors are seeking financial compensation when many are not. A woman whose father had been abused as a boy in the care of a religious order explained what he needed:

It's the acknowledgement that it did happen, and just believing these men because there has been so many stories, so many opinions that these people are, like my dad, the survivors, they're out just to get money, they see it as an opportunity for getting money from an organisation. But I know what it took out of my dad to admit, there's no one who's just going to sit and, and lie about that kind of thing. I just don't see anyone would be able to put themselves through that for, just to get a couple of thousand pounds, from somebody. So I think that was the thing that sickened me the most, the fact that, that they've been looked on as being money grabbers at any point.

Sometimes a victim or survivor who has been undermined or had their experience denied will, out of frustration, seek redress through legal means and in these cases, financial compensation is likely to be sought as part of the approach. Sometimes victims don't know where to go, and if they approach legal advisors first, some may be advised to seek compensation through a legal process, so the picture is complex. One former religious priest told us how he tried to address his community's attitudes towards survivors telling them that, in his experience *'the people who are now going to the press or whatever, have tried and tried and tried to get a response from bishops and from provincials and it's only as a last recourse that they're now going to the media.'*

Another common misconception, particularly amongst some office-holders, is that people who make an allegation are not telling the truth. One survivor spoke of how he was not believed because he didn't present as sufficiently traumatised. Survivors frequently describe a sense of moral injury inflicted on top of the wounds inflicted by the original abuse.

Another form of negative response happens when survivors find that their expressions of anger or their desire for justice are perceived as them being difficult and making trouble. Survivors are not the only group within the Church expressing anger about abuse, as later sections will describe, but their anger is important. Some survivors spoke about how they dealt with their own anger. One said *'I have to turn that anger into something useful because otherwise you're going to just seethe with it'*. Anger in this context is a valid signal of a sense of injustice or pain. A priest who works with survivors spoke of how one survivor's anger is *'because no one has actually sat him down and said, actually [name] inside this anger, there's a hurting child, let's listen to you'.* There are situations in which anger is rightful and necessary, however hard it is for office-holders to hear.

These negative perceptions demonstrate a failure on the part of the Church to recognise the victim or survivor as a person who is owed respect, compassion and pastoral care as well as justice. The need and desire for recognition is well expressed by a female survivor of abuse which happened because of a lack of safeguarding in a Catholic setting:

Moral injury

When people are compelled to act or become involved in activity which they know or sense or later realise is wrong, they suffer an injury at the level of their dignity and moral conscience. They lose confidence in their own goodness and feel betrayed by those whom they trusted to act rightly. The idea of moral injury emerged from thinking about the experience of soldiers in combat but is now understood to apply in many other contexts where people experience moral anguish as a result of what they are asked or required to do. One definition is that moral injury is 'the harm caused by betraying a moral code'.[35]

In relation to sexual abuse in Catholic settings, the moral injury is all the greater because the Church claims to be a moral community. The Church teaches us about conscience and what is right; so how can abuse have happened? For survivors especially, but also for bystanders and office-holders, there is moral confusion that can shatter faith. Moral injury adds to the trauma of the actual abuse, making it harder for people to believe in themselves or others or trust those in authority.

A research project undertaken in Xavier University in the USA, *Measuring and Exploring Moral Injury Caused by Clergy Sexual Abuse*, based on a survey of 389 survivors, church employees and Catholic students details the ways in which moral injury operates not only in survivors but also in other members of the Church.[36] The report explains the importance for survivors of making sense of their experience in some way, so that they can recover a degree of moral agency. Right relationships with others play an important role in recovering a positive moral identity.

The Church, it needs to stand kind of face to face with survivors, as Church…to put the survivors first, not the Church. And not their own feelings because they can't cope with it. As a survivor, you never had your permission asked when you were abused…We're told how we're going to do this, or we're told we won't be capable of doing it and we'd just like to be asked for once. And then we can say no, if we want to. So just please ask …Give the voice back that was taken.

Becoming a survivor

You start becoming a survivor when you make a conscious decision to take your due back from them, to take back from them what they stole from you. And part of that means standing up and saying, no more.

Each victim's response to their experience is different, so the point at which they become able to speak about their experience will depend on many factors. Most of the survivors in this research described how the moment of disclosing their abuse was crucial in the journey towards becoming a survivor and finding degrees of healing. Accepting that the abuse had taken place was significant, as was asking for help. Some survivors made their initial disclosure to a support professional. One male survivor broke down during a routine medical appointment just before attending the IICSA hearings. Others responded to one or more trigger incidents and others realised they needed to transform their anger into something useful. One survivor who spent years concealing his feelings was finally prompted to disclose his abuse when his son was born.

Half of the survivors in the research told us that they had been welcomed with more compassion and found more support from people outside of the Church than from their own pastors. These included a survivor who was treated with care and compassion by his employer – an experience which contrasted starkly with how he was treated by diocesan staff to whom he took his case. Another survivor experienced no warmth at all from diocesan staff yet received kindness, compassion and practical help from his GP, who found free counselling sessions with a survivors' charity for him.

Several survivors told us how valuable they found the experience of being witnesses at the IICSA hearings, where they felt affirmed and supported.

It brought me a great deal of comfort. The sadness was, it was the first time we'd experienced that and it was in a secular setting. Now what does that say for the Catholic Church that we had to go to a quasi-judiciary secular setting to receive the first element of a healing process? I mean, you know, hang your head in shame, Catholic Church for that.

Often this support involved being told from the beginning 'I believe you', an experience they felt had been denied in the Catholic institutions they had approached. Another noted: *'I have to say, it's so ironic, the whole process of giving evidence at IICSA and going along and the preparation experience, I was better looked after, than I was by the Church really.'* All those who described taking legal action against Church institutions and organisations found themselves well cared for and supported by their

barristers. As one survivor explained, ***'to feel that you had been better looked after by the lawyers and the Inquiry, than the Church, and [that} spoke volumes really.'***

The impact on survivors' Catholic faith

The impact of abuse and mishandling on personal faith and Catholic belonging is also different for each survivor. For some, their Catholic faith and practice is a comfort; for others, a problem. Some are angry with or have moved away from the Church. One male survivor described undergoing an active 'unbaptism' from Catholicism. Others stay connected but find a particular space where they can feel comfortable, which might be feminist theology, or their local parish, or a relationship with a spiritual director.

One survivor told us she felt the need to carry on the faith of her grandparents and doing so gave her comfort. The positive grounding in faith afforded her by good experiences of Catholic life in home, school and parish sustained her faith in spite of what happened to her. Others find their own paths and resources, mentioning sources such as feminist theology, mindfulness or retreats. There was also a strong testimony to the power of a specific healing retreat, From Grief to Grace, which recognises that the harm done by abuse is deeply spiritual as well as emotional, psychological and even moral.

Some continue to draw on Christian faith and spirituality but from other traditions and churches. Some survivors have discovered a kind of spirituality in the solidarity and mutual care and concern they share with each other. These are places where good can flourish and where people's spirits are nourished and become generous and receptive. One survivor talked about the companionship of a support group: ***'There's a closeness which takes away the loneliness, for me. It's a lonely journey; dealing with abuse is a lonely journey.'***

The paradox here is that the Church, the place where abuse happened, can also be for some people the place where healing resources can be found. Sometimes the resource is a priest who says the right thing, asks the right questions and enables trust to grow. Crucially, the places and people who might offer some hope of healing were discovered by the victims and survivors themselves.

From Grief to Grace

From Grief to Grace is a specialised five-day programme of spiritual and psychological healing for anyone who has suffered sexual, physical, emotional or spiritual abuse in childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Also described as a retreat, the process is grounded in the Scriptures, the Sacraments and prayer as well as using therapeutic tools from psychology and treatment of trauma. Survivors who have taken part in the programme testify that it brought immense healing. For more information see **Home | Grief to Grace (grieftograceuk.org)**

4. Conclusion: Why have we failed survivors?

Listening to survivors is a searing experience. The impact of being abused as a child is shattering, as their testimonies describe. It seems incomprehensible that the Church, in its institutions and office-holders, and also sometimes in its communities' attitudes, has so often failed to understand and respond with attention, compassion and justice. It has so often seemed that office-holders were more concerned to protect the institution and its reputation than to care for those who have been deeply harmed. As this research progressed, we realised that the need to explore why our communal response has faltered and frequently betrayed our own principles was perhaps our most important task. This is where the abuse crisis calls us to the profound conversion of hearts and practical action of which Pope Francis speaks, because it is the area which lies within all our capacities and responsibilities to change.

Chapter Three

Listening to the local Church

1. The experience of parish communities and the perspectives of women

In interviews and focus groups, we listened to members of five parishes in different dioceses that were directly affected by a case of abuse or sexual offences by a priest who had worked in their parish. A number of other research participants, including several priests and one deacon, also spoke about how the abuse crisis has affected parishes they knew. We considered a parish to be directly affected if there had been a case of abuse, or an allegation, or an arrest or prosecution for sexual offences, involving a priest who had ministered in that parish. It is important to note that although an allegation may arise in a parish, it may relate to alleged offences that took place in a different parish or other setting and/or at another time. We consider a parish to be indirectly affected when the allegation or case happens elsewhere in their diocese or because they are aware of the scale of the abuse crisis across the global church. It still disturbs people to learn about abuse or mishandling even if they do not know the situation personally.

The impact on parish communities and the way they respond is also influenced by a further factor. It will often happen that the victims are neither known nor visible to the community. This is necessary for legal and ethical reasons, protecting the identity of any victims and ensuring the integrity of any legal process. But it means that parish communities only hear and learn about what has happened from limited perspectives. The voices of victims, the people most affected, are rarely heard, making it more difficult for communities to understand the impact and discover compassion. There are other ways in which parish communities can listen to the experience and voices of victims and survivors, but we found little evidence of their use.

The impact of child abuse cases on parish communities

When confronted by a case in their own parish or a connected school, people describe a range of responses and emotions. These may be experienced as stages in a process, moving through shock and disbelief to grief and compassion or empathetic support for those affected. They are also shaped by individual dispositions and experiences; in most parishes there will be people listening whose lives have been affected by abuse in other settings. A priest described how the news about his predecessor being arrested was received in the parish: ***'It was like a bombshell, and people's reactions, I suppose they were hurt a lot.'*** A parishioner in the same parish described the shock as being so much worse because of how close the abuse seemed to be to her and her family. A priest who had responsibility for telling a different congregation the news of the arrest of a young priest who had recently served their parish described the response:

> ***It was the last thing they thought I was going to say but as I started to speak to them and tell them, yeah, that stunned and utter silence that it was received by the parishioners, at every single mass.***

Listening with Love

Listening with Love is a small group learning programme with seven sessions which invites people to listen to the experience of survivors of abuse and reflect on related passages from scripture. It was prepared by survivors in 2021 and offered to parishes for use in Lent or any other suitable time. The resource was prepared by survivors on the Let's Be Honest group (now known as the Isaiah Journey group), who were commissioned by the Bishops' Conference to do this work. The sessions are straightforward and prayerful; they use recorded conversations with survivors to invite reflection on the impact of abuse. This excellent resource is still available, but there is no data which indicates whether and where it has been used. See **Listening with Love - Catholic Bishops' Conference https://www.cbcew.org.uk/listening-with-love/**

A woman in the same parish described the community's response on hearing that their former priest had been arrested. She described her own reaction:

> *I remember realising I was crying and sort of wiping a tear away and not wanting to cry. I was next to a young man who has learning difficulties, and as an older woman I would feel protective towards a twenty year old man with learning difficulties and here I was not being in control if you like. And I can't quite tell you why I was crying.*

She spoke of the tears of others, including the priests, who stood together meeting people at the end of Mass. This meant that *'when people were coming out, they could talk, they could cry. They (the priests) were there for them'.* It is a striking feature of the responses in this context that there was sympathy and compassion for the current priests serving in a parish where a priest who previously worked there had been arrested and imprisoned. Parish members recognised the impact this would have on other priests.

In other parishes, people spoke of anger and a sense of betrayal. One focus group member commented *'a friend of mine, he was so angry in the end, he walked out and hasn't darkened the doors of the church since'.* Some spoke of how they feel more badly let down by the Church than by other institutions, because they expect higher moral standards:

> *I felt so angry, I felt so betrayed, I thought how could you, on the one hand, as priests, be talking about spirituality and love and on the other hand there is this dirty secret going on that you have been hiding all the time.*

I felt so angry, I felt so betrayed, I thought how could you, on the one hand, as priests, be talking about spirituality and love and on the other hand there is this dirty secret going on that you have been hiding all the time.

Anger was sometimes directed at the parish priest because he was their most immediate representative of Church institutions, or towards a bishop or other diocesan representative if someone came from the diocese to the affected parish. A research participant who had been responsible for visiting a number of affected parishes spoke about the range of reactions encountered: some feel violated; others feel an intrusive impact on their own relationships; others are accusatory, thinking that someone in the diocese must have known. The parent of a child in a monastery school badly affected by abuse noted the damage that had been done: *'It leaves a wound that needs to be healed.'*

Hearing news of allegations, arrests or convictions often leads to a great deal of self-examination among parish members. People described re-visiting their experiences and encounters with the accused priest, and of questioning their perceptions. They ask themselves did they really not see or know anything, and if they didn't, who did? People spoke of how they lost their trust in priests after learning about allegations and convictions. Priests themselves are painfully aware of this. One spoke of people's hesitation in coming forward for sacraments in a parish after a priest who previously served there had been imprisoned and noted an increase in the number of families wanting to know exactly which priest would be hearing confessions. The validity of the sacraments celebrated by the offender was also questioned: *'Does it still mean, what does that mean because was he really a priest?'* A case of abuse leaves a legacy

that affects parish relationships in a lasting way. As one young adult in a focus group said, ***'We're still a little bit wary of priests.'***

In one affected parish, there were also expressions of concern and sadness for the offender and for his family. There was recognition that the offender ***'must be damaged himself',*** that his life as a priest was over and would never be the same. A few wanted to write to the imprisoned offender. The concern for his family was also striking:

> ***I remember a number of people expressing their concern for [name]'s parents, which again I thought was lovely and beautiful really that people come out and were saying things like, this is dreadful. I can't imagine what his mum must be thinking, and we must pray for her. How's his family, you know, asking genuine questions. Less but still a significant smattering of people very appropriately saying, this is terrible for [name], he's done a terrible thing, but we've got to pray for him as well.***

Despite these strong and difficult emotions, most parishioners who spoke to us were clear that their faith was not diminished. Rather, it was strengthened, because their faith is in God, not in the institution of the Church. As one said: '***My faith's bigger than the priests. My faith's very much a relationship with Our Lord.'*** For some, faith becomes a resource for coping with what has happened. One woman religious said:

> ***It hasn't affected my relationship with God. If anything, it's brought me to my knees, in a good way, it has inspired me where God has inspired me into reaching out into an area that, when I think about it, is the last thing I want to be doing.***

This aspect of people's response illuminates a significant shift in the deep dynamics of Catholic faith. In the past, Catholics might have so closely identified their faith in God with their faith in the Church that these were almost indistinguishable. In the decades since Vatican II, the way in which parish pastoral life has evolved has invited people into a different structure, in which a personal relationship with Christ is central and primary, moving their relationship with the Church into a different space. Desmond Ryan commented on this in his research on Catholic parishes published in 1996: 'What happened at the Council was that the animating germ of community changed from loyalty to faith; a focus on Christ replaced the focus on the Roman Catholic Church.'[37] It is encouraging in relation to the questions asked by the abuse crisis that people can draw directly on their faith in Christ in order to respond.

Mishandling of the impact on parish communities

The way in which diocesan authorities handle telling parishes what has happened when there is an allegation or an arrest related to a priest they have known matters very much. Many people are affected, as described above. As this research proceeded, we became aware that what we term 'mishandling' also refers to whole parishes and other Catholic communities. Mishandling of communities happens through some of the same habits that describe how victims and survivors are failed: poor communication; a lack of transparency; a failure to realise what parish communities need; and an absence of pastoral care.

It hasn't affected my relationship with God. If anything, it's brought me to my knees, in a good way, it has inspired me where God has inspired me into reaching out into an area that, when I think about it, is the last thing I want to be doing.

When parish members told us how they found out about allegations against a priest in their parish or diocese, many described limited or unhelpful communication, notably from diocesan authorities. One parishioner found out through the national press that her parish priest had been accused of sexually abusing at least one child in the parish. She explained that no one from the diocese came to meet with the parishioners to explain what had happened:

> ***It would have been good to have somebody to come and explain to the parishes that had been sort of damaged, you know, what had gone on. But it was what you'd come to expect, that you're not really told anything, and you'll find out when and if you need to.***

Where efforts have been made by the diocese or parish priest to share the news with the parish, it has often not been done well, which can give the impression that the community's knowledge and the impact on them was not considered important. In another example, a member of a parish associated with a monastery badly affected by allegations spoke of himself

> ***as the person sitting in the pew, and I see all this going on in the headlines, you know, like, pervert priest did X, Y, Z, and I'm here as a reasonably educated person, thinking, you know, like what the [hell's] going on, sorry again, why isn't the Church telling me what it's done, what it's doing, you know.***

Some parish members described the sudden disappearance of their priest and lack of any explanation until later. ***'He was there one minute, then he was gone',*** one parish member said. This is a difficult area as information relating to an allegation or an arrest often cannot be shared fully, particularly once a legal process is underway or when the police are already involved. But the reasons why information cannot be disclosed are also rarely explained well and people can be left feeling overlooked. The further difficulty is that attempts to explain a sudden departure may in practice convey more information than is fair to the person accused. But no explanation is unfair to the parish community and has other consequences. One parishioner in a northern diocese described the shock of the sudden removal of a priest from the parish, creating a void which was then filled with rumours and speculation. In this case, the lack of information about the actual allegations, the fact that the investigations took several years, and the absence of support from the diocese, all contributed to the parishioners' inability to believe the allegations, even when he was convicted and sentenced to prison.

Sometimes communication with priests may be good but communities are still left out of communication. A priest who found out that his predecessor had abused several children in his parish describes personally receiving helpful guidance and visits from the diocesan safeguarding officer. But no-one from the diocese came to speak to the parish for some time afterwards, and this left scars on both the priest and the parishioners.

Breaking and explaining news to affected parishes about priests who have abused can be fraught with difficulties. In the parish just cited where a previous incumbent had abused children, the community only found out after the accused priest had died. The priest and parish

leaders present at the time described the efforts that went into planning how to handle the reactions from the community, including setting up a series of meetings so that all were given the chance to talk about how the news was affecting them. One unexpected impact of this open process was that other victims came forward, wanting acknowledgment and an apology. These situations are very delicate and demanding; no one can predict how this kind of information will affect people, and many priests and pastoral teams may feel they don't have the skills to manage such a situation.

One diocesan trustee told us how the diocese had handled communications in the wake of having had two priests convicted of sexual offences. Diocesan staff and senior clergy visited affected parishes:

> *The safeguarding coordinator did go and the bishop and one or two members of the clergy also went, and I think, I know they were quite apprehensive about this, because they faced, in some places, very angry parishioners who rightly felt angry and they have felt betrayed and deceived but what else could the bishop do? They, the bishop and the safeguarding coordinator, did visit the parishes to at least present a face or faces to the parishioners, those that wanted to take part in these meetings, and try to undertake some sort of healing.*

Pastoral care when parishes are affected

A member of the clergy in a diocese where an accused priest committed suicide recognised the emotions stirred up: *'It's valid, it's how people are reacting. Shock, disbelief, anger, anger at how the diocese behaved or is behaving, anger at what's going on.'* He saw the need to let these emotions *'run their course'*, letting investigations happen and pausing in prayer for all concerned. He also pondered whether and how they might have enabled parishioners to process the impact of this news, saying:

> *We've not opened up the discussion to, well actually, how is it affecting you? We just don't know, but there's a flip side that, why would we want to do that, what would be the benefit of it? There are loads of questions around that.*

Nonetheless, he said, *'I just need to be there, to listen to people, if they need to speak.'*

It is difficult to know what is best practice in parishes that are indirectly affected, whether to speak of the case to the whole parish community or to wait and listen. Sunday Mass congregations gather families and people of all ages, and each Mass may have many other elements happening. How far is it a suitable setting in which to speak openly about such matters, particularly when facts are few? Yet if it is not spoken about, people get their information from local and social media and other sources and trust in 'the Church' or in the ordained ministries falters. Even when information is available in public, it still matters that there is some communication in the parish that acknowledges what has happened.

> **If a parish community is to grow and take responsibility for its own life, and even more if it is to move into the experience of becoming a synodal church, it needs to face the parts of Catholic life that are difficult.[38]**

In the contemporary Catholic Church, a lot is expected of parish communities. The vision of a strong parish community held out in recent Catholic teaching includes an expectation of active leadership from the baptised, extensive involvement in ministries, capacities to absorb parishes being merged and the challenge of sustaining parish life with fewer priests available for ministry. If a parish community is to grow and take responsibility for its own life, and even more if it is to move into the experience of becoming a synodal church, it needs to face the parts of Catholic life that are difficult.[38] It also needs to be able to trust diocesan authorities and agencies and other leaders. There is a task here which extends beyond the reach of safeguarding policy and standards, a need to explore and model good practice in how to help parishes to process awareness of the abuse crisis, most of all when they have been directly affected but also when indirectly affected. We explore this further in later chapters.

Women's voices

A majority of those active in parishes are women. But as many research participants pointed out, the Catholic Church is still male dominated structurally and there is little institutional space for women's voices. Among our eighty-two interviewees and twenty-five focus group members, forty-three were women. They included survivors, religious, safeguarding staff, women in professional roles in Catholic organisations and institutions and women who were active in their own parish or in diocesan activities. The voices of the latter group, roughly a third of the total, offer further perspectives on how the abuse crisis has impacted on the life of the local church. The striking element is how their reflection on the questions raised by the abuse crisis led directly into a critical awareness of the habits and practices of clericalism, a theme considered in detail in the next two chapters. The voices of this latter group of women are presented here.

Clericalism impacts on women in ways that are different to men. Most of the women who spoke to us had a good grounding in theology, gained either through independent study or through formation programmes. They struggled with their awareness that their participation in Church life is often dependant on and conditioned by priests. Several had found that their education and confidence had often been challenging or even threatening to priests. As one woman said, ***'I can see that I may come across as a threat because I'm a woman, who has read, who has a mind of her own, who has, you know, thoughts about what kind of church we should be'***. Some had also noticed priests who were not comfortable working with women: ***'I don't know if they know how to mix with women. And it's not only about mixing with them, it's accepting them and realising that we have a voice.'***

They gave examples of habits and practices that communicated their status in church life. An older woman spoke of how it felt diminishing to call very young priests 'Father'. Another spoke of how priests controlled what could be put in the parish newsletter and how the newsletter frequently used phrases like 'the priests have decided…'. Several found the culture of needing permission frustrating. They expressed strong

views about the lack of consultation with active parish members on issues ranging from the new lectionary and missal to how changing how sacramental programmes are run by abandoning a family-based approach to catechesis. One woman observed that whilst she hears priests promoting synodality when they preach, it does not seem to occur to them to consult with parishioners or set up parish councils. A woman in another diocese described how the priest in her parish showed no interest in what women thought, even though they form the majority of parish members. He saw no need to consult when changing things in the parish:

> ***The strap line for the mission statement has been changed, the Mass times have been changed, without any consultation with anyone… the lack of understanding that actually I need to talk to someone about this before I do it, so in my mind, whilst ever there's that kind of structure in the church, we've got difficulties.***

This is perhaps felt most keenly when a new priest is appointed to a parish. Several women noted that parishioners have no role in selecting a new priest for their parish. A former religious sister noted that parishes cannot interview priests ***'finding out what their spirituality and theology was about and does it fit in with our community and are you the best person for this role.'*** Neither, she observes, does the system tackle 'ineffectual' clergy or those who do damage in the parish.

Two-thirds of the women had been in parishes characterised by good collaborative working relationships between the priest and the people, until a new priest arrived, when this was replaced by ***'It's "my way or the highway"'***. The mother of children abused by their parish priest talked about how an individual priest's style can affect a parish, sometimes changing the whole nature and feel of a parish, almost overnight: ***'And people feeling that there was nothing they could do about it, nothing at all…they had to accept it'.*** She added that the reversal of previous good practice is 'destroying' and results in many choosing to leave. A woman who had a professional background in education said of their new priest ***'he feels it's his job to change us and bring us back in line'.***

The women spoke of their desire to see more collaborative ministry in their parishes, which they believe often fails because of clerical attitudes and narrow understanding of what hierarchical structures are meant to be. They experience hierarchy as a structure by which power is exercised over people, rather than as a structure for ordering and unifying relationships and gifts, a service to communion. One woman argued that greater collaborative ministry could bring about ***'a renewed understanding of hierarchy or at least recover an emphasis in the meaning of hierarchy which is often neglected'***. She explained this further: ***'Hierarchy is what holds communion together, rather like the membranes in a leaf, it's part of what the Spirit gives to enable the Church to be maintained in truth and unity.'***

The paradox here is the strength of their faith, which often remains unaffected by the awareness of the extent of child sexual abuse cases and is combined with a searching analysis of the institutional Church. One woman was only too aware of the way in which she has,

Hierarchy is what holds communion together, rather like the membranes in a leaf, it's part of what the Spirit gives to enable the Church to be maintained in truth and unity.

even unwittingly, colluded with clericalism: ***'It's not just about clergy; it's about what we, as people, expect of our priests as well.'*** She noted that women can be drawn into tending to the needs of priests, into seeing them as helpless, and even to be pleased that 'father' asks things of them. Another woman who shared this awareness commented: ***'I can see that I should be different, sometimes it's easy to slip in to the role of baking a cake for the priest or you know, looking after... as a person...I need to reflect on how I am with the priests in that way.'***

The women had careful insight into the reality of child sexual abuse in the Church and how it has shown the need for far-reaching change. One described it as a 'wake-up call' to the church to recognise and accept the radical changes that are called for. Another woman in the same parish said ***'We're the body of Christ and if one part of that body is injured or is broken, we're all broken a bit and injured a bit.***' They believed that only deep transformation may begin to heal these wounds. A mother and justice and peace worker said: ***'For me personally, healing would look like, we're really going to change structures, and systems and processes. We're really going to commit to a kind of formation that enables a parish community to feel it shares responsibility.'*** They know that, despite all the reports published and inquiries conducted, change will still need to be systemic, and that it will not be easy. The need for the priesthood to be ***'changed, transformed, redeemed, whatever'*** will not happen with a bit of counselling or pastoral accompaniment. A woman with professional experience of management saw that this change needs to be led from the top. Her concern was that there is a lack of leadership that can transform; individual bishops might be ***'quite visionary'*** in their souls but ***'the system stamps it out of you.'*** So the Church need bishops ***'who won't be stamped out, who won't be smothered, who won't be killed by the system'.***

We're the body of Christ and if one part of that body is injured or is broken, we're all broken a bit and injured a bit.

Young women in the Church

We also listened to several younger women who spoke of the radical complexity of belonging to the Church at this time and the burden they carry from knowing about clerical child sexual abuse in the Church. Their experiences were similar to those of the older women. Two spoke about meeting younger priests who they felt were uncomfortable with them, perhaps because they are young and female. They are keenly aware of their tendency still to accept priests being set upon a pedestal but they saw the complexity here: ***'The Church and priests still occupy this hypocritical position where they are derided and heralded, you know, there's a real sense of shame around being a priest, and at the same time, well, they're God's servants on Earth.'***

The younger women's voices were distinct in their awareness of how unusual and almost liminal it is to be Catholic in our highly secularised society. They spoke of how their Catholic belonging has to be further justified in the light of the shame caused by public awareness of clerical sexual abuse. One young woman said:

The way that, like when I am viewed by even members of my family or my friends, in what kind of is or isn't said about the fact that you belonging to this group, makes you either complicit or tacitly kind of like okay with the fact that that happened and is still happening and are they, you must be a bad person or, at the very least, like a morally questionable person.

Another participant described how her best friend, *'an ardent atheist'* quizzed her on how she could stay in the Church:

She said, all joking aside, if my dad had done this, I couldn't see him again and if my brother had done this, I couldn't see him again. If my best friend had done it, I couldn't see them again. Why are you still in it?

Their words express defensiveness, some elements of guilt and of being torn, but not certainty or pride or security or hope. This final quote from one of the younger women expresses the disappointment and frustration but the dream of potential:

What keeps coming to mind is that I feel like there's two kinds of Catholic Church. One's sort of like a corporate institution, and one's a spiritual community and it feels really disjointed at the moment... just the way in which things get run, whether that's in the youth service or in a charity or whatever, it feels like sometimes the worst of the corporate world and maybe the worst of the spiritual world, are sometimes put together, when the Church could actually be a place where the best of the corporate world and the best of the spiritual world could join forces and be a force for good.

In analysing the data, we looked for material in which research participants commented on the role of women in relation to the abuse crisis. There was some data in which people commented on the unequal status of women in a male-dominated Church but the theme which emerged most often was a sense that women's perspectives are needed for a healthy Church, and that there are too many levels of authority and decision-making in which their voices are not heard. We realised that the significant element in this research was not what participants said about women; there was often a weariness in these comments, a sense of having said these things many times to little effect. Rather, it was the distinctive perceptions in the voices of the women who took part in the research. They spoke with far reaching insight, clarity and compassion about the dimensions of the abuse crisis and its impact. They are also parish members, survivors, family members of survivors, members of religious communities and professional safeguarding staff, and we have not separated out their voices in the relevant chapters. But the significant conclusion here echoes what has been heard in listening processes across the whole Catholic Church in recent years; the voices of women need to be invited and heard at every level of the Church. This is all the more important if the Church is to find pathways of conversion and action in response to the abuse crisis.

2. The voice of the child

One of the limits of this research is that we could not listen directly to the voices of children who have been abused in Church settings, speaking as children. The survivors who spoke to us were adults recalling what had happened to them in childhood or in teenage years. Their actual experiences are embedded in their traumatised memories and psyches, conditioned by the attitudes of the Church and society towards children at the time when their abuse took place. As already noted, it is established in wider studies that child abuse often only comes to light in later years. Victims may take decades before they disclose what has happened.

There were some glimpses of how earlier social and ecclesial attitudes to children affected victims in the reflections of adult survivors and others who spoke in this research. One man recalled earlier social attitudes: ***'A child should be seen and not heard and that was endemic across the whole of society, not just within the Church.'*** Children were often viewed in negative terms. A female religious, a former teacher, said that when she was training to be a teacher, some sixty years ago, ***'Children were "wicked", in inverted commas, children needed to be punished, children told lies. This was the general sort of atmosphere everywhere.'*** In the Church, as in society, children's accounts, if they risked speaking, of how they were feeling, what they thought, or what had happened to them were often not believed.

Participants described examples of this happening in Catholic life. A woman who was educated by sisters and whose health was badly damaged by the failure of those sisters to believe her when she fell and knew she had broken a bone: ***'They kept telling me, I was the one that was wrong.'*** Another survivor who is now a teacher spoke about the lack of respect for children that she has witnessed in the Church and the mistaken belief that children are able to get over and recover from anything:

> ***Well, the way they've treated children, this idea that nothing affects children has been such a warped view, that children are resilient and get through things, but also that children take on the sins of the fathers and the mother. It's been absolutely ridiculous and that has gone on for years into the seventies, and into the eighties … I think it's been a complete lack of respect for children and their needs, it's been the same within Catholic education…. but it's not just the Catholic Church, it's society as a whole.***

The attitude of not taking children seriously enabled some Catholic authority figures to trivialise their experiences. A priest who is now on a safeguarding plan talked about how, historically, 'everyone' in his community played around with boys, touching their bottoms, for example. He claimed that everyone knew but that ***'I wouldn't say it was acceptable.'*** He didn't condone it, but also did not condemn it outright. A priest reported speaking to another priest about a child who had been raped by a different priest: ***'What did you do about the child who was raped by the priest? Instant answer, I never thought about it again. What? Excuse me, where's your humanity?'***

There were also reflections in the data of how perceptions of the child in contemporary culture have changed so that a child is now seen as a person with agency, whose experience should be taken seriously. A parish priest told us ***'we have to accept children, the dignity of the child and maybe that was part of the problem. The child's experience of life may be limited but it's a real experience.'*** The earlier comment by a female religious now retired from teaching highlights seeing the child not as the passive recipient of learning but as able to 'teach' the religious who often were not specifically trained to work with children:

> ***What I think I've found in many ways is that, for religious who are running, if you like, a rather elitist enclosed organisation like an independent school, working with the children and being involved with lay teachers, in many ways, helped the religious to mature, in a way that their own religious training had not done.***

Although absent from our research in any direct form, the voices of abused children are present in the voices of the survivors who have spoken. They are heard when some survivors recognise their own 'inner child', and when they express concern for the safety and protection of other children. A female survivor reminds us that when we are dealing with adult survivors of childhood abuse, ***'it has allowed the child to come out'***. Another survivor reflected that as he gets older: ***'I realise there's always a small boy in us somewhere, you know, still feels that there's nothing we can do but what we do is dodge the bullet every so often and just get on with our lives.'*** This indicates an important element of any listening to survivors, the need to understand that it may be the 'small boy' who is speaking, not the adult whom we see.

Survivors described becoming aware of the desire to protect other children becoming stronger and easier to articulate after they had accepted the fact of their own abuse. A female survivor remembers this point in her own journey: '***The penny dropped, well it dropped in stages, but I was actually on holidays, walking across a beach and the penny dropped in the middle of this vast beach, if he did it to me, did he do it to anybody else?'*** For some who spoke to us, this led to a sense of guilt for not having reported their abuse at an earlier age, especially after discovering that their abuser then went on to abuse others. A religious sister, a survivor of clerical abuse said: ***'Actually I felt a bit guilty because I thought, gosh, maybe if I'd come forward earlier, he wouldn't have retired back to Ireland and then started abusing children over there.'*** Survivors who have become activists have said they have been driven to this partly to seek justice but partly to ensure that what they experienced is never repeated. One of these spoke about his feelings towards the religious order where his abuse occurred:

> ***I've no wish to hurt them. I want them to tell me that they are doing something for the future, and they're doing something to protect children...I do not want any child to go through the three years that I went through. I do not want any child to do that, who felt hounded, lost and didn't know where to go and alone and couldn't tell their parents and living away from [home], and it just, it horrifies me.***

A survivor of abuse in a monastery boarding school is writing a book about his experiences, with the hope of saving ***'a few young people from being interfered with...well then, you know, I'll have done something.'*** Another survivor added ***'I permanently worry about children'***, asking how we can guarantee their security and protect them from the worst excesses of people.

Recognising the rights of children as paramount

Attitudes in society changed with the growth of child psychology, which framed the child as an individual person in her/his own right. The 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of Child was a significant milestone, asserting and establishing the child as an individual with agency and rights. In England and Wales, a parallel milestone was the Children Act of 1989, setting out a legislative framework for a child protection system based on the paramountcy principle in which the child's best interests should be the paramount consideration in any legal matters. The Catholic Church in England and Wales followed soon afterwards, making a commitment to the paramountcy principle in 1994 in the first set of policies for safeguarding children, *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines*.[39]

3. The experience of priests

The voices of priests describing the impact of the abuse crisis on their lives and ministry are heard less frequently in this crisis. Priests are often framed as those who bear responsibility, yet many also feel harmed by what has happened. Their experience and their perspectives are important in building a full understanding of the pain and trauma in the Church. They also play crucial roles in the conversion and transformation that the abuse crisis asks of the whole community of faith. In interviews and a focus group, we listened to seventeen diocesan priests, seven priests who are members of religious orders and one permanent deacon[40]. The diocesan priests came from nine dioceses in England and Wales. One of the religious priests also worked in a parish setting. Two priests had been the subject of an allegation and investigations and had returned to ministry. One religious priest was living under a safeguarding plan. At least two were also survivors of abuse.

This section also includes observations from diocesan safeguarding staff who recognise how the abuse crisis has affected priests and changed their ministry.

The impact on priests

The psychological impact of abuse cases on priests was commented on repeatedly, by priests themselves and also by parish members, members of religious communities, diocesan staff and others. Learning about specific incidents of abuse in parishes they have served or in their dioceses as well as knowledge of cases of abuse across the global Catholic Church affects the emotional, psychological and physical health of clergy. The impact is cumulative as successive waves of allegations and prosecutions emerge. Priests feel shame and some expectation that they must carry some of the blame for the actions of others. They also feel the burden of absorbing the anger and sense of betrayal felt in parish communities when a current case or a historic case erupts. They are expected to handle communication and the aftermath, often with little guidance and sometimes with limited information. Those who have experienced the arrest of a close colleague are even more deeply affected.

For some priests, this has altered how they feel about the Church itself and has impacted their morale. We heard from or of several priests who express the desire to give up their ministry and from any role in the Church. Some look forward to retirement or think of retiring early. One priest said, ***'it's not nice now'***. He admitted to being ashamed, not just of the Church but at being a Catholic: ***'I look with horror and sadness, beyond imagining.'*** As well as the fear and vulnerability, there is also a weariness and a real desire to move on, but each new allegation drags people down again:

I do think it's something that we try to live with and when another case happens, we think, oh gosh, this is going to push us right back into that kind of image that people have of us, which has just, it means that we don't have a clean portfolio at all.

Several priests spoke of the support they had received from family and friends, but also the warmth and friendship of their parishioners, which helped them cope with the impact of a fellow priest's offending. Whilst they expected some hostility from their parishioners, they experienced the opposite:

My overarching concern was, will the people be able to trust their priests, having my immediate predecessor being charged with such horrendous actions. But I was humbled and overwhelmed really at the warmth and the generosity with which the people enveloped me and they were more concerned about how I was coping with the situation at hand than the situation itself and to this day, that has probably been the most humbling experience of my priestly life, a completely undeserved generosity of the people in times of great challenge.

There were fewer examples of support received from diocesan office-holders or staff. In one valuable exception, a diocesan bishop brought together the priests and deacons who had been affected by a case, to meet and spend some time together, reflecting on their response and feelings. This was described as being positive and helpful.

The impact on pastoral ministry

The combined psychological and emotional effects of having to be so cautious and feeling hemmed in by policies and procedures have led to an impoverishment of ministry and pastoral engagement. A heightened awareness of their own vulnerability and the need to safeguard themselves has caused priests to adapt aspects of their ministry, particularly with regard to children. A recently ordained priest reflected:

I've seen too many priests freeze when a child goes to hug them, and that's coloured that relationship for ever thereafter because the child will perceive the priest as someone who's uncomfortable in their presence.

This is painful; one priest observed that it is not possible to carry out pastoral ministry effectively without attaching oneself to people, to really engage with them, and in this area, getting the boundaries right is always challenging. A priest involved in the ministry of safeguarding feels pessimistic when faced with this conundrum: *'The whole thing has affected our whole priesthood...how we interact with people.'* One parish priest remembered how it was when he was a younger priest, in and out of family homes, playing football with the boys and reflects *'you wouldn't do that now...if there's not an adult about.'*

There is a further impact on pastoral ministry from public perceptions of Catholic clergy. Priests know that allegations against other priests affect how all clergy and male religious are perceived in the Church and by society more widely. Jokes about 'paedophile priests' are now common in all media and any example is universalised across other churches. Many films and documentaries have featured clerical abuse

as a theme and survivors have published memoirs. Many of these are valuable testimonies, including those that are rightly critical, but they still contribute to a perception of all priests that is unfair to the majority who have not abused.

Knowing that many people now primarily view priests in suspicious terms can be very difficult to manage or respond to. A couple of those who spoke to us reported having children shout 'paedophile' at them. In one disturbing incident, a priest who was not informed by his bishop that his predecessor had been arrested visited a local school and came out with spittle on his back. A safeguarding officer observed that some priests in the diocese preferred not to wear the clerical collar to avoid being recognised as a priest. The provincial leader of a religious order reported that some colleagues had been falsely accused simply because they are members of the same order or taught at the same school where other men had been accused. He added that this climate and experience can work against community members accepting the necessity of safeguarding and expressing concern for victims.

The vulnerability of priests and the fear of false allegations

Priests fear being the subject of an allegation, especially where they may not be informed about the specific allegation or where the investigation process which takes place is open-ended and unpredictable. Several participants referred to fellow priests being asked to stand down from ministry with little understanding of the nature of the allegation being made against them or of what would happen to them, leaving them feeling isolated and abandoned. Safeguarding officers see and hear this anxiety at close quarters. A member of diocesan safeguarding staff described how the first three hours of a five-hour safeguarding training session were taken up with priests saying how vulnerable they felt. She gave examples of their fears: ***'I'm going to get a knock on the door in the middle of the night'; 'I'm going to be moved somewhere, and I'm not going to know what's going to happen for years.'*** The threat of sudden removal from ministry, referred to as 'being kidnapped' or being 'helicoptered out', is seen as particularly traumatising as when this happens, the accused person loses any sense of agency over their own life.

Another safeguarding professional believed that priests fear safeguarding policies because they feel there is no real safety for them. The diocesan safeguarding officer quoted above described priests talking anxiously about

> ***how there was no one there to protect them, the bishops don't protect them, their bishop would not protect them; they haven't got the money to appoint legal representation if they are in that situation, and… they'll be hung out to dry.***

She commented that the lack of leadership from bishops made priests feel more vulnerable and exposed. This is complex however. When a bishop does show leadership in one area, making a public apology for example, it can increase priests' anxiety. Referring to an apology given at IICSA, she said, ***'Clergy felt they were being let down by that apology because they felt that they would be, they were being tarred with the same brush, if you like, as offenders.'***

This fear of being falsely accused of abuse is often based on what has happened to fellow priests, and sometimes on stories that may or may not be accurately reported, raising the question as to whether this is a grounded fear or a perceived but unlikely one. A diocesan safeguarding professional said that false allegations are rare, but that they do exist. She and her colleagues try to reassure priests during safeguarding training that if they follow best practice, they will be less vulnerable. She acknowledged however, that this is often met with scepticism. The impact of having had a false allegation made against you is significant and can be life-changing, as recognised by all who have been close to such a situation. A retired parish priest used the image of a sword of Damocles hanging over the head of clergy, threatening a lasting impact that cannot be undone.

We listened to three priests who were the subject of allegations and investigations. In two cases, the police decided there was no case for further action. One returned to ministry after an assessment commissioned by his diocese, and the other moved to a different diocese after investigations showed the allegation to be false. The third priest was living separately from his religious community under a safeguarding plan. Despite the particularity of each case, there were some common elements to their experiences.

The first of these was the perceived lack of clarity or transparency of the procedures for dealing with their case. The older of the two priests returned to ministry reported that after he was asked to withdraw from ministry, he was never sure who was responsible for him, for keeping him informed, nor what other priests and his parishioners would be told and by whom. When the police found no case to answer, the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) insisted that his diocese should carry out an investigation even though at that stage the diocese was unaware of the exact nature of the allegation against him. He was then required to do a full psychological and risk assessment and subsequently returned to parish ministry. He recalled how this happened in a meeting with his bishop:

> ***He said, you're free to return to ministry and I said, am I? I said, is this the end? He said, yes, yes, it is. I said, well, how would I know that, because there's no set of procedures about things that's written down, about what I have to go through, and who makes decisions about me and what happens?***

In this case, the priest also became aware that his bishop had failed to maintain confidentiality, telling other priests and people from his former parish about his case even when the bishop had no knowledge of the actual allegation. This led to rumours and gossip about the priest and was a lonely and isolating experience.

The second element is how the priests in this situation lamented the lack of care and concern from their diocesan authorities and agencies. The second accused priest, who was younger and from a religious community, reported not receiving any pastoral care or visits from office-holders in the diocese in which he worked. He felt ***'unsupported and even unwanted'*** by the diocese, a feeling shared by the older priest: ***'We don't expect it from the diocese because it's not there and, as I've said, from day one of ordination, X years ago, you kind of knew that and nothing's***

changed'. This suggests that the trust necessary to work through these very difficult situations had already either been lost, or not established in the first place. A bishop affirmed this:

> ***The priests themselves, even when they've voluntarily stood down from the ministry, can feel badly let down by the Church that they've tried to serve all their life, and feel that things are weighted in favour of people who make an allegation and less in terms of the process of justice.***

A parish priest described accompanying a priest who was accused but where the case was never proven. The accused priest was told by the diocese to pack his bags and leave the presbytery. He was given a house but put on an open-ended safeguarding plan. This resulted in his feeling completely unsupported and ultimately more vulnerable.

When asked what kind of support would have made most difference, whether he needed friendship, pastoral care or clarity about procedures, the older accused but exonerated priest responded that most of all he needed clarity about the situation and what was going to happen next. This leads to the third common element, how the psychological and emotional impact of the experience of being accused led to a great sense of shame and loss of confidence. The younger accused priest described how he felt when he was 'cleared' by an internal investigation and allowed to return to ministry: '***I felt really that I was no longer a priest because I find myself a kind of immoral person who is trying to moralise people in the church, with homilies, I was ashamed of my own person'.***

The older priest who found himself in this situation describes the long-lasting physical effects of the shock of being accused: ***'I went into shock, I couldn't possibly comprehend what was happening, what I was going through, so you just try and take it day by day and deal with yourself.'*** He describes suffering from 'brain fog' and a collapse in his self-confidence. The younger priest reported being left feeling too anxious to go out, feeling safer alone and in the comfort of his own room. He now tries to avoid all contact with young people and children. He saw this reflected in others, when lay people asked why his order were increasingly withdrawing from youth and children's ministry, because they feel it to be high risk. His instincts as to when and where he feels safe in ministry have been dramatically redrawn.

The situation for priests in this 'grey area' is particularly difficult. Priests in a focus group felt that such priests are never fully exonerated. One said:

> ***I have some sympathy with the bishops because people are never exonerated, if you send a guy for psychological assessment, the report never says, 'this guy's fine, he's no risk'. The best it ever says is, it's a low risk.***

He described a current case which cannot go to court because some

vital evidence has been withdrawn, where the bishop had to tell the priest he could not allow him back into parish ministry because there was still an element of doubt in connection with the case. Even when returned to ministry, the experience and even the concept of exoneration casts a shadow. One of the priests accused and returned to ministry that spoke to us rejected the use of the word 'exonerated', as he says he did nothing to be exonerated from.

Priests and safeguarding: progress and resistance

The development and implementation of safeguarding policy and practices over the last 30 years has also had a significant impact on the pastoral ministry of priests. It is clear from many who spoke to us that major progress has been made in the design and provision of safeguarding training for all ordained ministers and religious over the last ten years in particular. The provincial leader of a men's religious order noted that novices are now more aware of what it means to safeguard all and each other, and also of the complexities this is likely to entail. Whilst being very positive about the current provision he acknowledged there is still room for improvement when it comes to understanding abuse and its impact more fully. He welcomed the idea of mandatory reporting of incidents within the Church, as recommended by the IICSA final report, and he felt it would be ***'quite liberating actually.'***

Among the research participants, there were roughly equal numbers of comments showing a positive commitment to safeguarding training and standards and comments indicating a continuing reluctance to engage with aspects of safeguarding requirements. Within this range, a minority of priests were very positive, and a further minority were reluctant to engage at all.

Diocesan safeguarding staff who design and present training for the priests and deacons and other pastoral staff are key observers of resistance among clergy. One safeguarding professional referred to several priests in their diocese refusing to complete safeguarding training and at least 30 other priests seemingly attempting to avoid the training. Some dioceses now link attendance at training to granting of a *celebret* so that priests cannot celebrate Mass outside their own diocese unless they have completed the training.[41]

Resistance of this kind invites exploration and reflection. It may be more important to understand why priests resist a particular training provision than to seek a disciplinary approach to compliance. Training that is genuinely formative needs to be experienced as listening to their needs and concerns as well as ensuring they have the knowledge needed to lead and model good safeguarding practice.

Some reluctance and resistance may be related to a perception that training and procedures constitute more bureaucracy and 'box ticking'. A younger priest expressed concern that compulsory safeguarding training might be seen only as an administrative exercise to satisfy audit requirements. But a monk whose community had faced many allegations and incidents explained how they had come to accept this as part of their new reality: ***'We've brought it on ourselves; this is how we now***

need to correct some of the imbalances in the past.' His community now understand that the protocols they have in place are for their own protection as well as the protection of visitors.

Where resistance is found, there is often also a leadership gap. A diocesan safeguarding officer saw the main obstacle to developing a culture of safeguarding as the failure of diocesan trustees to show leadership in this area. Another safeguarding leader described experience of earlier resistance among bishops to the setting up of national structures as part of the One Church approach, for fear such structures would undermine local autonomy. Whilst both of these should now have changed following the IICSA reports and the Elliott Review, they are still part of the story of how resistance may not have been challenged at diocesan level.

One of the priests who had been falsely accused offered a further reflection:

> *The one thing that I do realise was, this whole area and how it affects the Church, is governed by fear. I can remember going to safeguarding days put on for the priests by the diocese, and we'd all be sitting there, and not only would we be afraid, I mean really afraid, but so very often, the content of what was being dealt with, made it sound like we were being accused as well just for being priests. And that climate of fear seems to dominate everything, not just individual priests but the diocese as well.*

His own response, based on his experience was to *'grab hold of your fears, to stop them dictating the rest of your day... when you spend time in prayer, when you face your fears, when you learn to let go and let God do what only he can do, then you can sleep at night.'*

4. The experience of bishops

We listened to five diocesan bishops in interviews, roughly a quarter of the number of diocesan bishops in the geographical dioceses of England and Wales. Two bishops took part in the closed meeting towards the end of the research. Several other bishops expressed warm support for the research at various stages but were unable to participate directly for practical reasons. One bishop did not respond to repeated invitations.

We also listened to many participants' views on how bishops had acted in the different domains of handling abuse allegations and cases, with victims and survivors, alleged and convicted offenders and with affected parishes. Some of these came from direct experience of survivors or of priests or people who had worked closely with bishops or Bishops' Conference structures or agencies. Some perceptions were from a less informed distance and indicated how little many people know about the reality of what bishops face in their multiple roles and responsibilities.

All the bishops described the impact on them of learning about and dealing with the abuse crisis. All also spoke about the transformative impact of listening to survivors. And all spoke about the complex task of

being responsible for priests against whom allegations have been made, and priests who have been convicted and imprisoned.

The personal impact on bishops

Each bishop spoke personally about how the abuse crisis has impacted on their lives. They spoke of being humbled, being challenged and being changed, and of the successive stages of learning about what the abuse crisis means for their ministry and for the Church. Some have only become bishops in recent years yet they inherit responsibility for a legacy of abuse that was unrecognised or mishandled in the past. ***'I can't undo what was done in the past'***, more than one said. They were confounded by the reality of abuse; ***'I think there's a sort of mysterium iniquitatis, to use that term, at work in the whole area, you know, there's no doubt about it, the mystery of evil is very real'***, one bishop reflected, recognising the damage done by abuse. They also spoke about feeling inadequate: ***'I don't even know what I'm doing when I'm meeting with people'***, one said, adding that he would be willing to resign if it was found that he had not handled things properly. They rely on following advice and procedures: ***'bishops are only as good as they are advised',*** one said, but they are also increasingly aware that their pastoral instincts should be more important than advice given by insurers. Each also spoke about the importance of knowing their own dependence on God in their ministry. As one bishop put it:

> ***You need to be very firmly rooted in prayer and relationship with our Lord and just keep going back to him all the time, because there's some things we know we might be able to help with, other things, you just kind of think, well, what on earth do I do here?***

For another:

> ***I just think, well, if you want me to do this Lord, you'll have to give me the where with all to do it, I, I can only do it as me... and I'll do my best.***

Listening to survivors

Each of the bishops spoke about their commitment to listening to survivors and what is asked of them in doing so. Often they are listening to survivors of abuse that took place before they came to their dioceses or to survivors who have experienced poor responses from other Catholic authorities to whom they have disclosed. They spoke about the importance of believing survivors and of accompanying them, and where needed, advocating on their behalf. For one ***'when people talk about survivors being aggressive or, or demanding, um no, the survivors are just responding to the hurt that they've received and that's what you have to listen to and to believe and to walk with'***. Some decided to apologise even when the abuse was not within their own sphere of responsibility.

They also recognised that the response to victims is still not adequate: ***'I think there's still a way to go on that for us as bishops'***, another said, describing his own experience as 'a bit of a journey'. ***'Unless we're survivors ourselves, we'll never fully be able to understand the***

level of pain', he added. Another described his time with survivors as experiences that were 'among the most privileged of my priestly ministry'. Such meetings were *'very humbling because I didn't know how people would react'*. For this bishop, there was what he termed *'relational learning, that requires accompaniment, to be with somebody over a period of time'*, recognising that it can take years for some survivors to share everything they have experienced. For another bishop, the first time he met with survivors, *'I have to be honest, my heart was racing as we were coming up to that meeting because it's not something I've really done before and I just thought, this could be very challenging personally'*. Later, he said, he saw such meetings as times *'when I just feel most a pastoral minister'*. Another described how when people were crying, he wept with them. Two bishops recalled carefully checking out in advance what they should wear to ease such meetings. There was also a strong sense among the bishops of being humbled and also grateful:

> *I'm astonished that many of them have the innate goodness, the generosity and actually the Christianity within them to actually look after us, to nurture us, even though we've so badly abused them, let them down.*

Listening to and accompanying survivors asks bishops to be vulnerable and to bear some of the pain that is disclosed. It has to be an open-ended process. As one bishop commented, '*the wounds are so deep that there will be some survivors who will probably never be satisfied'*. This may have been intended as a recognition of the depth of the trauma, but it also implies a question which challenges us all. Must there be a period in which healing is achieved? For some, even with good support and help, the wounds will remain. A further question then follows, about how much is expected of bishops in relation to how survivors are supported. How does the whole Church share this responsibility? It was clear in this research that some bishops continue their relationships with survivors beyond initial meetings, but not all may be able to do this.

I think most bishops will say that it's actually an impossible task.

The complexity of the bishop's role

They also reflected frankly on their role as bishops. One bishop said: *'I think most bishops will say that it's actually an impossible task'*. He listed some of the reasons: multiple new demands on their time, often from external legislation such as GDPR; the expectation to create and work with many committees and commissions, and increasingly with lay trustees on a bishop's council; and the impact on how they work of multiple means of communication. Even belonging to the Bishops' Conference itself, although important, *'brings with it quite a lot of work, and you've got all the diocesan stuff and all the various other things that just go with the role. So yeah, one is well occupied.'*

The expectation that the bishop has to sort everything out also creates a particular burden. One bishop pointed out that people – especially priests – rarely tell bishops the truth. He expressed discomfort that *'what I say can often nudge a conversation completely or hijack it'.* For that reason, he tries to speak last, but this sits uncomfortably with people's expectations that he would be the first to speak. So *'somehow,*

the exercise of authority and, and the unquestioning of that authority… perhaps it paralyses people… both the person in authority and the person subject to that authority.'

As the abuse crisis has been revealed over the past thirty years, the bishops, and their response, has always been in a spotlight. They have been criticised both within the Church and in wider society, most seriously in the IICSA investigations. The bishops who spoke to this research were aware of the slowness of their response and the mistakes made. One bishop spoke about the *'delayed understanding'* in the period from the Nolan Review in 2001, which established the One Church approach, to the meeting of the English and Welsh bishops in Valladolid in 2019, at which a number of survivors were present.[42] He saw this period as a time during which Church authorities and leaders were so concerned to get the policies and procedures right that they overlooked the need to understand the impact of abuse on the victim or survivor.

Another bishop believed this was the right order of priority, that it was important to put robust policies in place first. He concluded that *'perhaps some of that tension is maybe necessary, if you had somebody in the position who was simply being pastoral, there is the risk that they can't see and that you end up, you can't see the wood from the trees.'* In contrast, a different bishop suggested that this approach had caused suffering to victims and survivors in the past:

> *If we're incapable of empathising and feeling compassion to those who present themselves to us in pain, then what on earth is happening? At the heart of the Church is a crucified Lord, and our response has got to be one that stands at the foot of the cross, like Our Lady, and weeping at the foot of that cross. You don't stand to the side, dispassionately, making theological observations; you run to the foot of the cross and you grasp at the foot and you kiss it, that's the only, the proper response to suffering, not dispassion but compassion.*

One bishop was shocked to hear that some dioceses or religious orders are still privileging advice from insurers and lawyers, designed with the good of the institution in mind. A decade ago, responses would very much have been 'lawyer-led', with insurance companies shaping the kind of response to be offered to a victim. He described working to turn this position around but admits that it did provide *'a bit of safety'* for office holders. Bishops are still feeling their way through these dilemmas, learning how to respond, drawing on the expertise of safeguarding professionals. Sometimes this has worked well and sometimes being risk averse and over dependant on professional advice has impeded a pastoral response.

The multiple roles a bishop has to play come back into view here. He must be both pastor and shepherd, and father and brother to his priests, and chair of the diocesan trustees with legal and statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of the trust. This makes apparently simple steps very complex. Even simply saying 'I'm sorry' becomes difficult. The leader of a male religious community facing similar complex responsibilities explained:

> *Issues around apologies inevitably start to impact upon questions of insurance, and that lawyers and insurers, and lawyers working for*

insurers, then start to become involved, so the simple thing of being able to say, 'I'm so sorry' becomes quite a complicated thing.

He described a situation in which a survivor began a legal process but then looked for something more like what he described as *'a process of natural justice and human encounter'*. The dynamics of trying to hold both of these together created *'a very uncomfortable space for all concerned, it's not a comfortable space for the survivor but it certainly isn't a comfortable space for anyone else either.'*

Bishops and accused priests

The bishops spoke about the difficulty of their dual responsibility to support victims and also to support accused priests. One bishop conceded that seen from the perspective of a survivor, it might look very unfair that a bishop attempts to support both parties. He described it as *'a bit difficult path to tread, it really is.'* Whilst the principle of the paramountcy of the victim has been accepted formally by the bishops since 1994, in practice this can be challenging. A bishop described the conflict he experienced:

It's very difficult if, as bishop, you are with victims and survivors and you say to them, I believe you, even though there isn't yet any proof, that I believe and accept what you're saying, which we are encouraged to think and to understand is really important for victim survivors, to be received and accepted and believed. And on the other hand, how you respond as a bishop to a priest, where the default position is one of trust and if there is accountability there, in that direction, and how then you square that, if the priest says, I didn't do these things. Do you believe me, do you trust me? And the Vatican documents are saying you can neither reject nor confirm and it's so hard to be in the middle there.

The same bishop explained that he has *'a theological relationship with priests and deacons, which is different to and complementary to his responsibilities, for example, if he's the Chair of the diocesan trustees.'* He observed that this conflict is recognised by the Elliott Review, *'because on the one hand, within canon law, you are both the judge and the pastoral support. You're the provider of both of these.'* He notes that the new independent National Tribunal Service will take away from the bishop some of that accountability for the canonical judgement, which will be helpful, *'but it doesn't take away the conflict between the sorts of judgements that need to be made pastorally and the provision of support.'*

A member of seminary staff reflected that this area of allegations and whom to believe is, for bishops, *'the thing they are most scared of'* and expressed concern that they recoil rather than have *'courage and faith and step out into that murky chaotic world'*. The temptation to *'hide behind the altar'*, as this staff member described it, relates to the vulnerability that bishops cannot avoid in this area, and how they recognise and work with this experience.

Father, brother, friend or line manager?

There is a further conflict within the bishop's relationships with the priests in his diocese. He must balance pastoral care and support with proper oversight, including, where necessary, when there are 'grave lapses' and crimes, intervening in a 'firm and decisive, just and impartial' way, to provide 'correction'.[43] He remains responsible for the priests in his diocese even when they have been convicted of crimes, unless and until they have been laicised, that is, dismissed from the priesthood and barred from any ministry. In some cases, this may continue for many years; one priest against whom allegations had been made but no charges brought lived under a safeguarding plan for some seventeen years, not allowed to minister or attend Mass in his local parish.

Bishops strive to be close to the priests with whom they share ministry. Many have studied alongside some of their priests in seminary formation and all will have worked closely with priests who take on diocesan roles. One bishop talked of the emotional and pastoral difficulties involved in ***'reporting on another brother priest',*** asking himself whether he had done the right thing, knowing the enormous impact this would have on that priest's life. He knew it was the right moral action, but worried about whether his response had been right pastorally.

Another bishop reflected with great candour and compassion on how difficult he finds it to provide pastoral care to accused or convicted priests. He spoke of how he tried to proceed with great caution when cases are unresolved and unproven, leaving priests in what he called the ***'twilight zone'***, where nothing was proven but they still have to be subject to restrictions or possibly required to live under a safeguarding plan. He pondered how he felt about men suspected of such abuse, admitting that the bishop may not be the best person to offer them pastoral care. He continued: ***'There's a lot of stuff in me that would find it really quite difficult to love them, to accept them, to affirm them'***, adding that he suspects that most bishops and priests would feel the same.

These are dilemmas with no easy answers for bishops, particularly regarding what happens to convicted offenders once they have served their sentences. Some argue that convicted offenders should be laicised, as recommended by the Nolan Report, as this makes their status clear and offers a chance for the offender to re-build his life.[44] One retired priest who had held relevant diocesan responsibilities described a decision to apply for laicisation for two priests after they were sentenced and imprisoned whether or not they consented. Laicisation may be preferable to remaining under the discipline of a safeguarding plan which restricts what a released offender can do and where he can go.[45]

Others assert that when convicted priests are laicised, they are unsupervised (other than through registration as a sex offender) which may create more risk and vulnerability, and that the Church has a continuing duty of care to monitor and support released offenders, which is easier if they are still held in some way within the Church. Several research participants spoke compassionately about this duty. For a religious sister, ***'we need to behave as Church in how we treat these men and their vulnerability'***. A priest whose former colleague had been imprisoned described his willingness to visit the colleague in prison, if the

priest in question wanted this to happen, and explained how he would be willing to support any released offender. He did realise that many others would not feel they could take on such a responsibility.

5. The experience of the Church in public spaces; the impact of IICSA

The impact of the abuse crisis has not only been felt internally in the lives of victims, survivors, parish communities and those in ordained ministry and religious life. It has also changed how the Catholic Church is seen in wider society, which in turn affects both its capacity for moral leadership and its social and educational mission. This is a further level of impact for all members of the Church as well. Some aspects of this impact are explored in a separate report based on a quantitative survey we undertook during this project.[46]

In the qualitative research, we listened to experiences and perceptions related to a particularly significant event in the public life of the Church, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). This Inquiry was briefly described in Chapter One. Here we present aspects of how the research participants experienced or perceived the Inquiry and responded to its reports.

The experience of taking part

A significant number of people in leadership positions in the Catholic Church gave evidence to the Inquiry, including bishops, leaders of religious communities and safeguarding staff and officers.[47] Many survivors also gave evidence.[48] Among this project's participants, three office-holders and six survivors gave evidence.

For survivors, the experience was always significant and often positive. As described earlier, for some, it was the first opportunity they had of being listened to, which brought comfort and relief, and an experience of pastoral care which they experienced as lacking in their contact with Catholic institutions. A female survivor who felt better looked after at IICSA than by the Church described feeling ***'very lucky to have that opportunity'*** to speak. Survivors appreciated how the Inquiry engaged with their experience through the Truth Project and other forums. For some, speaking out was a necessity; one survivor narrated her decision to appear, based on a concern that Catholic survivors were not speaking out, which risked allowing Church officials to escape accountability. Another survivor was motivated by a desire to help the Church to learn and to heal, recognising that most of its members had not concealed or committed any crime.

For one rather isolated survivor, listening to an earlier witness ***'empowered me, because the beatings, the strapping to the bed, the torture, and this is all the same institution.'*** He also found it ***'powerful'*** to give evidence in front of a bishop, although another survivor found it difficult to testify in front of the bishop implicated in the mishandling of her case.

There were also some emotionally costly aspects to giving evidence. One survivor spoke of the pain of hearing the evidence given by Catholic leaders, which she perceived as denial and obfuscation. A family member of a survivor who was present at the Inquiry describes the impact of hearing her deceased father's statement read out:

> ***It was only at the IICSA inquiry, my sister and I went down, this was just a few months after my dad died, and they read out my dad's statement there and I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach, it was such a shock to me…actually hearing them, was absolutely sickening, like, you know, I just couldn't believe he went through all that without actually really telling us.***

For those in institutional roles in the Church, IICSA was a complex experience and perceptions of its impact on the Church varied significantly. For one office-holder, the experience was difficult but ultimately positive. Although ***'rather fearful'*** in advance, he described how much he had learned and understood more deeply from the experience of IICSA. Another former office-holder who took part felt that '***the best resolution for the Catholic Church would be, well, first of all, to acknowledge its appalling failings'***, and spoke out strongly about the weaknesses in Catholic safeguarding structures.

Reactions to the report on the Catholic Church

Reactions to the work of IICSA and its findings among the wider group of research participants who didn't take part in IICSA were varied.

One safeguarding professional thought its recommendations were weak, but a religious priest described the report as ***'paralysing'.*** Some thought that the report gave the Church ***'a very hard time'.*** One woman was saddened to see the Church portrayed as misogynistic and homophobic, but acknowledged that this was probably deserved. A bishop felt that the amount of attention received was unwarranted and lacking in perspective:

> ***I think the Church is a soft target. Whether it's the Catholic Church, the, Anglican Church or any other church and it's quite obvious that a local authority that was looked at by IICSA recently, has had far more cases.***

Some asserted that the understanding shown by some IICSA officials of how Catholic institutions work was inadequate, particularly in relation to religious congregations: ***'IICSA could not understand how the EBC was constructed, they could not get their head around it'***, one bishop noted.

Some of those who spoke to us were aware of defensive responses being prepared. A pastoral worker described receiving an email from her diocese asking for prayers for a bishop who might be affected when the IICSA report was due to be published. She didn't know how to process this apparent privileging of concern for a bishop over concern for victims and survivors. Another pastoral worker described frustration because ***'only some people could talk about (it) and other people couldn't…. and I remember realising I could follow the whole thing myself if I wanted to.'*** It was clear from a few voices that what could be described

as Catholic exceptionalism emerges when the Church is challenged, a sense that the Church is somehow different from other institutions or entitled to different treatment.

Some reactions were complex. A younger adult described listening to a survivor speak on broadcast news about the report and blaming 'the Catholic Church' and reacting defensively; ***'I found my mind thinking, but that's not the Church, that's, it's the bishops, it's not the Church, the Church is us'*** and then feeling ***'ashamed'*** at her own reaction, her resistance to hearing what the survivor was saying. Many parish members, priests, religious, and bishops spoke about the impact of the reports on them, of feeling disturbed and chastened by the extent of the abuse and the evidence of cover-ups and other mishandling. Most felt some level of shame for the Church and about being part of the church. A safeguarding officer expressed disappointment that media coverage of IICSA's report on the Catholic Church faded so quickly; the release date coincided with breaking news about the Chair of the UK Football Association having to resign over offensive comments made in public, a story which dominated headlines.

Others saw the IICSA process as crucial and ultimately helpful. A leader of a male religious community thought that IICSA ***'needed to happen and needed to shine a spotlight into a number of areas.'*** A priest with experience of diocesan child protection work said:

> ***Institutionally, despite warm words and things having been said over the years, we were rightly caned by IICSA because we hadn't altered our behaviour sufficiently for people to see that the message had gone home, and I think that's going to be a very steep climb for a lot of people.***

Among research participants, no-one disagreed with the IICSA recommendations, but some felt they did not go far enough in calling for change. One religious sister with experience in safeguarding described the final report on the Catholic Church as ***'wishy-washy in its recommendations'***, containing ***'nothing new'***. She expected it to be more ***'cutting edge'*** in its judgements, addressing, for example, the need for different leadership or culture change.

These diverse reactions illustrate a pattern we see throughout our data. Across the Catholic community the experience of the abuse crisis and how it has been handled confuse and disorientate our views of the Church and its leaders and lead to multiple interpretations. Some get caught up in the same patterns of denial or minimising that are implicated in mishandling; others practise openness to the reality as it is told, however searing. Some want resignations; others want to know that future responses will be truly pastoral and reflective of the Gospel.

How the Bishops' Conference response to the IICSA report was seen

Some perceived the Bishops' Conference response to the IICSA report as weak. One priest saw it as still ***'combative'*** rather than accepting full responsibility. Another participant felt that the Church's response to IICSA was ***'very sort of, of PR legalese'***, ***'crafted to kill the story'*** and lacking in any pastoral response and concern for victims and

The response of the Bishops' Conference to the IICSA report

As already noted, the Bishops' Conference immediately accepted the recommendations of the IICSA report in November 2020. They issued a public statement expressing sorrow and making a fresh commitment to listening to survivors. The IICSA report was received at the same time as the Elliott Review report which the bishops had commissioned a year earlier.[49]

Both together resulted in an action plan which was also published.[50] The areas of action agreed by the bishops covered:

- Leadership: appointing a lead bishop and a lead from religious life groups for safeguarding.
- Training: ensuring training is mandatory and ongoing for all who minister in the Church, including volunteers and employees, who have safeguarding responsibilities.
- Compliance: ensuring that non-compliance with safeguarding policies is tackled and that sanctions can be applied if compliance failures persist.
- External auditing: ensuring that effective independent auditing of safeguarding practice happens.
- Canon Law: requesting the Holy See to redraft parts of canon law relating to child sexual abuse.
- Improving national safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Improving how complaints are handled.

survivors. Several survivors and some priests were very critical of the Cardinal remaining in post after the Inquiry report was published and some thought he should have resigned. One woman described herself as *'getting angrier and angrier'* at the bishops' response, which she felt was defensive. Another woman with significant Church experience described herself as '*horrified'*; *'we're no further ahead than we were in the days when I was saying, perhaps we don't take it seriously enough'.* She expressed concern for the younger generation of Catholics who inherit this legacy.

One chair of a diocesan safeguarding body was disappointed that the IICSA experience had not prompted the bishops to commission research into how and why abuse happened in past decades. A typical judgement from a leader of a religious community described the bishops' response as '*reactive manoeuvres'*, which he feared would not improve the situation but rather *'it's my view, they'll make it worse'*.

The formal response of the Bishops' Conference to the Inquiry reports may have disappointed some, but this research discovered a wider picture. There was also humility in the reflective responses of individual bishops and evidence of a willingness to learn from the experience. None of the bishops who spoke to this research regretted being called to account by secular authorities and the media.

The experience of the Inquiry also dramatized some of the tensions faced by bishops. One bishop described the privilege of being exposed to the accounts and courage of victims and survivors, seeing IICSA not as humiliation but an opportunity to learn about how people's lives had been changed by abuse and how the Church had failed them. The expectation that bishops will behave and speak in a certain way was also visible. One survivor was not impressed by the Cardinal but found that other bishops were *'more kind of credible and essentially humble'*. A male leader of a religious congregation noted the irony that the Inquiry called for more centralised control in the Church, when it is more usual for the Church to be criticised for being too centralised.

After the Inquiry: implications and action

Most participants appreciated that the Church now faces considerable pressure to ensure that procedures are in place and adhered to. But there were also doubts. A bishop and a religious sister expressed concern that being publicly shamed has driven Church institutions and hierarchy to copy the landscape of safeguarding in the secular world by accepting the *'received wisdom'* of a compliance based model, rather than seeking an authentic model expressing our own best principles and values. Some fear that the new model will leave something of a vacuum in the response to survivors.

Although some research participants felt that setting up the Elliott Review before the IICSA report came out was premature and hasty, one senior safeguarding officer said that the bishops had felt IICSA *'very keenly and were therefore determined to implement the Review, and the recommendations speedily'*. An experienced bishop gave the example of the appointment of a lead bishop for safeguarding as a direct result of the IICSA recommendations.

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6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a range of diverse voices from those who make up the local church, the diocese and parishes, describing how they have experienced the abuse crisis. This portrait makes visible several significant themes and dynamics. It is clear first of all that everyone is affected; whether it is a young adult working in the Church, a recently ordained priest, or a bishop who inherits cases of abuse and mishandling which still cry out for justice. The words of one participant summed this up: ***'Everyone is somehow implicated. I can't describe it but that's my sense now, that we're all part, we are all, collectively, part of the problem and part of the solution.'***

When people are able to hear the real story, most of all to understand the experience and pain of victims and survivors, but also to know about the desolation and grief that office-holders feel when confronted with difficult tasks and inherited failure, they respond with faith and authentic compassion.

The whole Catholic community is experiencing the impact of this crisis although many may not be consciously aware of how it has affected Catholic life because they have not been invited to reflect and notice. The young adults who took part in a focus group in this research were interesting in this regard. They had not been directly affected; but when invited to explore their thoughts, feelings and instincts, they realised how much the deeper dynamics operating in the abuse crisis affected their experience of the Church.

The words of an active female parish member quoted earlier are worth recalling: ***'We're the body of Christ and if one part of that body is injured or is broken, we're all broken a bit and injured a bit.'*** If this is the case, that the whole local church, the whole body of believers, is ***'broken a bit'***, how do we enable the whole Catholic community to understand better what has happened and recognise what it asks of us?

The second theme that emerges is that the way in which the Catholic Church organises itself has made it more difficult to achieve the right or best response to victims and communities. The structures of ministry and leadership and the expectations placed on priests and bishops have often impeded or blunted pastoral instincts. The cultures of local church life and relationships have not helped. They do not build maturity and transparency in communication. They do not allow adequate space for women's voices to be heard. They do not sufficiently understand the vulnerability of priests.

Finally, there is also a more hopeful thread to the experiences described, a thread which is explored in more detail in Chapter Five. When people are able to hear the real story, most of all to understand the experience and pain of victims and survivors, but also to know about the desolation and grief that office-holders feel when confronted with difficult tasks and inherited failure, they respond with faith and authentic compassion. But this leads to a further question; what more do we need to do to enable and support such responses, not just in the parishes and leadership ministries directly affected, but everywhere, in all areas of the local church?

Chapter Four

Listening to religious communities

1. Introduction

We listened to nineteen members of religious communities, eleven from men's congregations and eight from women's congregations. Three of the men were religious brothers and the other eight were ordained priests. Six belonged to three different monastic communities; two belonged to orders that are active in many fields of ministry. Two of the women belonged to monastic communities. At least seven were or had been in leadership roles either at provincial level or in a monastery.

The distinctive voices of religious women and men are seldom heard in the pastoral life of the local Church and still less is heard of their experience in relation to the abuse crisis. The way in which congregations and communities have had to examine their life and work varies depending on their particular form of life and their ministries. Their perspectives on abuse take in a broader range of types of abuse than the cases of clerical sexual abuse of children; they have had to acknowledge physical, emotional and spiritual abuse as well as sexual abuse. The voices presented here also explore the factors that facilitate or are conducive to abuse within different forms of religious life and the impact on communities of developing good practice in safeguarding.

The distinctive voices of religious women and men are seldom heard in the pastoral life of the local Church and still less is heard of their experience in relation to the abuse crisis.

The prevalence of abuse in male religious communities and ministries

The data available about sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church in England and Wales is limited and somewhat fragile, but it does give an indication of the scale and character of what happened, including some details about the degree to which religious are involved. In Bullivant's statistical analysis covering the years from 1970 to 2015, 37 per cent of the complaints of abuse made to Catholic institutions related to religious orders, covering 390 alleged abusers.[51] Just under half (49 per cent) of the male religious congregations surveyed submitted data about complaints. The numbers of complaints were in single figures each year until 1992, and then rose rapidly over the next decades, peaking in 2010. The complaints largely related to abuse in earlier years, with the highest levels of abuse reported as happening in the 1960s and 70s.[52] New cases continue to emerge, but the data suggest a significant reduction in recent years compared with the high rates of abuse reported during the latter half of the twentieth century. In 2019, the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission reported that seventeen cases against religious priests were ongoing and twenty-eight religious priests and five other male religious had allegations made against them.

In male religious communities, sexual abuse of children is mostly associated with schools under their care. We heard comments on this area from survivors and family members and from male religious. Two of these, the former provincial leader of an order of brothers and a parent of children who attended a monastery school, identified a strong link between sexual abuse and having access to children. Running schools, particularly boarding schools, gave priests and male religious access to children and the opportunity to abuse them. We heard other

evidence describing the cultures which allowed this to happen. A male religious told us it was common knowledge that members of the community shared beds with teenagers prior to the 1980s. A survivor of sexual abuse in a monastic boarding school spoke about the behaviour of the brother responsible for their year in school who frequently sexually assaulted boys in the showers and in the dormitories at night. Boys also had to put up with violent beatings in class. He said of his school: ***'It was so prevalent; I mean it was everywhere.'*** These internal cultures of abuse and secrecy created a breeding ground for transgressive behaviours in other settings. The former provincial leader of a men's religious order reflected that the fact that they did not run schools might be one reason why they had never had as many cases and allegations made against them as other male congregations had experienced.

In our interviews with religious, we heard accounts of what appear to be examples of religious congregations attempting to deny or cover-up suspected or actual incidents of abuse by their members. Some of this was seen as unintentional. Research participants told us that at the time, people were unaware of what others in their communities were doing. Others reflected that in the days before safeguarding training, they did not know or understand signs of abusive behaviour. Even if they saw it, they did not have the language to talk about it or the procedures to enable them to report their suspicions to those in authority, either internally in the community or to external church authorities. As a result, offenders were often able to hide in plain sight, enabled by the culture of secrecy that existed and continues to exist across parts of religious life.

Some of the denial and cover-up however was consciously decided. Moving 'troublesome' priests was a common response in religious congregations as it was in dioceses. The former provincial leader of a men's congregation said that his time in leadership had taught him that there were two failsafe indicators of suspected or actual abuse: missing documents and the man concerned being sent abroad, sometimes repeatedly or permanently. ***'It seemed to me, that somewhere along the line, it was possibly one of the coping mechanisms, get the problem out of the way and also obliterate the evidence.'***, he reflected. This was often done to try to protect the reputation of the congregation or the Church or even to protect the reputation of the individual priest or brother. A priest and former religious described a particularly disturbing incident where he tried to draw attention to the presence and behaviour of a known abuser in the congregation. The head of the order responded by saying that ***'father must be protected at all costs because he is a consecrated person.'*** No one was prepared to take any action against the man, and instead, the order arranged for him to go to a different country where he abused again, and then was moved on again, in a familiar pattern.

Terms to describe religious life

There are many terms used to describe the structures and roles within religious life. As noted in Chapter One, in this text, we use 'congregation' and 'order' interchangeably to refer to the larger body to which an individual belongs, and 'monastery' or 'local community' or 'religious community' to refer to the particular units in which people live. Most orders are international, but work in regional provinces, so we also talk about provincial leaders and local leaders. Province size varies and may cover the UK or may include other countries. Sometimes we do not explain whether the leader is male or female to protect anonymity. In some religious communities, the leader is termed 'the superior', and that term appears here in some material from the data.

The prevalence of abuse in female religious communities and ministries

Very few women religious have been accused of sexual abuse. The small amount of data that exists suggests that sexual abuse is less common among women religious, but there have been accusations of spiritual, physical and emotional abuse, and of neglecting those in their care.

We listened to two survivors of forms of abuse by sisters, both relating to some decades ago. One, in a school run by sisters, suffered psychological damage as a young boy. Whilst receiving medical care, he was sexually shamed when the sister providing his care brought other sisters in to look at his involuntary sexual arousal. The other survivor who also attended a convent school holds the sisters responsible for a serious sexual assault which happened as a result of their failure to ensure her safety on a school trip.

One leader of a women's congregation admitted that they had a history of incidents of abuse: ***'None of our stories are sexual. They're all about things like, you know, I wet my bed, and somebody punished me by doing this and cruelty, harsh treatment; they talk about being hit over the head with a hairbrush or something. All of that nature but to such an extent that it was abusive.'*** Another admitted that 'abuse' in their schools was likely to have taken the form of spiteful belittling and undermining, which might seem petty but can cause lasting damage.

The bullying and emotional abuse described by participants was experienced mostly in schools and other institutions where the women were largely accountable only to themselves. These institutions gave women access to power in a Church that has always denied it to them. The experience of having access to power and leadership in their own institutions has brought many advantages to women religious across the centuries, but it clearly also has its shadow side. A safeguarding professional said although it is recognised that abuse by women is less common, power corrupts both men and women and that abuse by women head teachers, for example, is not uncommon.

Abuse is not limited to those in the care of women religious. A former provincial leader identified that the real issue in female religious congregations is probably bullying of their own sisters. She told us of a culture of bullying that emanates from imbalances in power. In naming the issue of power, she highlights something we do not expect to hear, that like most of us, some religious sisters desire and misuse power. In her experience, when sisters are overlooked and denied power and authority, some feel themselves to be victims or survivors in some way. She expressed hope that training in safeguarding in the broadest sense might help surface these issues but feels that women religious have to face up to the desire for power within themselves.

The data that is known

Stephen Bullivant's analysis shows that 37 per cent of complaints in the period 1970-2015 related to religious; 344 complaints relating to 390 individuals.[53] Only 8 per cent of female congregations had complaints to report (compared with 4 per cent of male congregations). These figures only relate to sexual abuse.

National Catholic Safeguarding Commission reports from 2015 (at least) to 2019 include data covering physical and emotional abuse and online grooming as well as sexual abuse. During 2019, for example, nine allegations or concerns were raised about female religious, and 33 were raised about male religious, including religious priests. For the allegations against female religious, sexual abuse accounted for 10 per cent (one case) and physical and emotional abuse for 80 per cent. The type of abuse was unknown in one case (10 per cent).[54]

2. The impact of abuse and abusers on religious communities

The shock of abuse and the challenge to community life

Religious usually live in community with other members of the same congregation, so discovering that people they have lived alongside, often for many years, have been accused and or found guilty of sexual offence is likely to have a particularly profound impact. A diocesan safeguarding officer described one such community as being ill equipped to deal with this knowledge. The shock, hurt and disbelief often developed into bereavement and grieving processes, both for the pain caused and possibly for the loss of a member. The soul-searching and questioning of each other's judgement and involvement affects the internal community dynamics and the extent to which community members can trust each other and themselves.

The nature of religious communities means that offending members cannot simply be sacked or 'excised'; they remain part of the 'family'. A monk who has seen this situation at close quarters said: '

> *Those who have allegations made against them have to step aside and the time it takes seems to be so long, so how to support people in that position, without becoming too partial? Because sometimes we will see the brethren in a certain way, within our own community, and we know them well and we love them.*

The cases which are most difficult for communities to respond to are those which remain unproven, because the allegation is never resolved, and the member can never be fully acquitted or exonerated. The suspicion lingers, trust is broken, and relationships often cannot be healed. Actual conviction brings greater clarity; sanctions can be applied and there is a clear outcome. But where there is no clear outcome, the person's life is put on hold as they are required to live under and comply with permanent restrictions.

Collective guilt by association

A further element of harm results from entire communities and orders being condemned or treated with suspicion by outsiders. One sister spoke of her sense of solidarity with male members of her order who had been dreadfully hurt by the actions of some of their brothers. Although they themselves were innocent of any criminal behaviour, they had to share the blame and responsibility. The leader of a male congregation made a very powerful point which represents the reality now for many male congregations:

> *One thing that bothers me is when I hear Church leaders banging on about how ashamed the Church should be for what's happened... I don't think that's a helpful, or appropriate*

The experience of living on a safeguarding plan

We listened to a member of a religious order who had been accused of sexual offences. In his case, the police had judged there to be insufficient evidence to prosecute him. He was removed from his community, a move he felt was done to protect the reputation of the school and community. He felt coerced into agreeing to a safeguarding plan which limits and regulates his movements including where and how he attends Mass. He described a complete breakdown of trust, between him, those assessing him, the safeguarding staff and his brothers and the leader of his community. He believes he would be better treated if he admitted to what he is being accused of, but maintains it is 'a pack of lies'. He is very angry, lonely and feels abandoned and shunned. Most of all he feels that what is happening to him is a grave injustice. He also believes it is unclear who ultimately made the decision to remove him from the community; his perception was that all the parties involve deny it was them: the school, the community, trustees, safeguarding staff and others.

The decisions and reasoning may be clear to others involved in this situation, who will have their own perspectives, but if it is not clear to him, then something is not working. One diocesan safeguarding officer, familiar with such a situation, observed that it is very difficult for communities to work out what to do in support of an offender after release from prison. What kind of relationship is possible or desirable, and what do they owe to the individual in practical terms? These questions apply also to individuals whose lives are restricted by safeguarding plans.

response at all. Some of us need to be ashamed for what we've done but I think it's important that we don't let the toxicity of this thing leak into places where it doesn't belong and that of course is the problem we're talking about, culture... One of the problems is [that] it can end up culpabilising people who have no real guilt to bear and that's not healthy. I don't think we should all just be going round terribly guilty and paralysed when, when most people have done absolutely nothing wrong.

Indiscriminate blaming of entire communities damages the members emotionally and psychologically. It may also make it more difficult for them to hear and believe victims and survivors because they may also feel a wrong has been done, even though it cannot be on the same level as abuse. Further, it may create resistance to safeguarding practice, because people feel defensive rather than open.

The impact on those in leadership

Several leaders of religious communities have been directly impacted by the IICSA process. In some cases it has been followed by their resignation or removal from leadership. Some took responsibility for failures in oversight and others were more explicitly implicated. Others were wounded and exhausted by their involvement in the inquiry itself. For many in leadership, and in the Conference of Religious of England and Wales (COREW), preparation for the IICSA process and then implementing the Elliott Review, particularly the establishment of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service, (RLSS) which assists religious communities to develop strong safeguarding practice, has come to dominate their term in leadership.

One of the most challenging situations for those in leadership in religious communities is the duty to support both the victim and the offender, with a thin wall of separation between the two. This is not only a source of stress to the leader but also affects the quality of the support they can offer to both victim and offender. One leader gave a very graphic example of this. The leader was invited to a memorial event for victims and survivors abused in one of the congregation's institutions. At the parish cemetery, the leader was standing facing the grave of the victim, but with the grave of one of the congregation's accused members behind: one thing happening in front, and a contradictory event behind. This leader said it felt like being torn apart *'that's kind of how it feels - steering a course between supporting the [members] and reaching out to the survivors. But it has taught the community that they've got to hold both as well.'*

Recognition of the toll this is taking on the lives of religious, particularly of those in leadership is often given hesitantly. The question of whether any individual leader should bear any guilt is very complex. The provincial leader of a men's congregation said:

We're open, possibly sometimes too open, to the idea that we've failed, and that can be quite inappropriate when what happened took place before I was born, which, I've, situations I've dealt with. So I think it's pretty crucial, to be honest, that we do find places to give that support

Another provincial leader was keen to share the experience of this burden *'so that the other side of the coin can be healing... there's a desire to use whatever little experience I have, and the congregation now has to bring a redemptive quality to the suffering.'* Both these leaders would like to find a forum where they and others in their position could share their experiences. The first was clear in that whilst he does not want to focus on leaders' own victimhood, he does want to draw attention to the need for them to support each other and learn from each other's experiences.

The impact on mission and reputation

Religious men and women acknowledge the damage that allegations and convictions of child sexual abuse has done to the reputation of the institutions involved and many now accept that this is deserved. One religious sister said: *'I can see that after the whole IICSA debacle we've lost a sense of credibility, and I think we're in no position to criticise. Things have gone so wrong...we've been so stung and saddened, hurt... by what's come out in IICSA...as a Church we've created this situation.'*

The abuse crisis has also changed the structures of life for some orders. For several monasteries, the IICSA process has compelled the legal and physical separation of monasteries and their associated schools. As most of this has happened relatively recently, communities are still coming to terms with the impact. Safeguarding compliance and procedures have become a prominent feature of daily life. One monk told us that their lives are now governed by key codes and different coloured lanyards. Another said that the assumption previously was that monks would go on to teach in the school no longer held true; that this was now highly unlikely, except in pastoral roles which are very tightly controlled and monitored. This also applies to the assumption that some religious priests would go to serve in parishes traditionally associated with particular monasteries. However, both of these changes are also being driven by falling numbers of vocations for all religious communities.

3. Aspects of religious life implicated in how abuse has happened

Cultures and power in religious community life

Any Catholic institution in which abuse has happened faces a question; have there been distinctive habits, structures or dynamics within their institutions that have been conducive to abuse taking place? Most male and female religious, whether in active or apostolic congregations or monastic communities live in community, and most are aware of this question.

Many of the cases of abuse reported in recent decades occurred when communities were larger. Several male and female religious identified elements of their cultures which enabled various forms of abuse both within the communities and in the institutions and ministries run by the

order. These included: misuse of authority and obedience; cultures of secrecy leading to a lack of openness; and the inability of community members to form and maintain mature relationships with each other.

One monk who spoke to us referred to members of his community as ***'juvenile in their behaviour and arrested in their psycho-sexual development; lacking trust in one another and unable to develop their personal relationships with each other'***. He attributed some of this to the abuse of power by superiors, arguing that abuse in a system such as a religious order or congregation will lead to an inability to develop a mature understanding of obedience, one of the vows taken by religious. Earlier notions of religious obedience were based on the superior being seen as a living representative of Christ; members vowed absolute obedience to the superior's will. This can make them vulnerable to manipulation and abuse and prevent the processes of maturation and personal growth. The provincial leader of a male community suggested that his brothers actually expected certain abusive behaviours from a superior. A current leader said he believes that the tacit acceptance that religious life will be tough, at least among male religious, can lead to tolerance of abusive behaviours.

The monk referred to above stressed the need for members to develop respectful, trusting, and honest relationships with one another, both between members and with the hierarchy. Those seen to be particularly powerless in traditionally very hierarchical communities were those youngest in religious life – postulants, novices and juniors. We heard of a case of a novice monk who decided to leave under such circumstances. A priest and former religious spoke about his own experience:

> ***I was a novice at [institution] and the superior ruled the roost with an iron fist and...was an out and out paedophile. He was in the scout hut, he was in the school, he was fiddling with older boys, and everybody just sort of laughed and said, oh that's what he's like and, when you're a novice, you are absolutely powerless. You've got to toe the line...I had no status, no voice.***

The issues of power, lack of power and misuse of authority can be exacerbated by the fact that some members will have known each other and lived together for many years. Dysfunctional relationships and abusive patterns of behaviour, within a very hierarchical structure, have often been established early on, and are very hard to tackle.

Religious communities as 'families'

Religious often talk of the relationships within the congregation or community as being like families. They have known each other for lengthy periods and often have lived together. Until recently, they left their own family to 'cleave' themselves to this new set of relationships which took priority over those with their birth family. This understanding and practice has now changed, but the congregation still looks after its members in all the ways one might traditionally expect families to do.

The familiarity, close relationships and bonds of loyalty developed can make it very difficult to recognise and acknowledge an individual's inappropriate and concerning behaviours. It can also be hard to see

these behaviours from the inside. As one lay safeguarding professional said: ***'If you think about a family dynamic, a lot of people don't realise until they're out of their family setting that the dynamics that they're in are abusive'***. It can also create a culture in which it is very difficult to speak out and report that behaviour. A monastery, for example, is home to the community members; it gives them all that they need and expects stability, obedience, and in cultural terms, loyalty. Therefore, challenging and questioning the behaviours of others can feel like betraying a family member. This can be hard to understand for external statutory bodies and authorities, and in contexts such as the IICSA process. It becomes particularly difficult when communities have to deal with offenders.

The members of a religious order have an unusual and complex relationship with the order and with those who represent it in leadership. Members in most congregations will have taken a vow of obedience which, even if understood in the broadest terms as listening for and discerning the will of God through the community, still sits uncomfortably alongside a more modern awareness of the individual's rights. This arises from the dual nature of the relationships; the order is both home and workplace – but members live as brothers and sisters, not contractual employers and employees. This ambiguity, so different from a conventional workplace situation, leaves members vulnerable to being badly treated by those they regard as family members. There are no complaints or disciplinary procedures in place in the same way as in a conventional workplace setting, and it is hard to admonish or remove someone for their behaviour. This vulnerability has led to calls for members to have access to someone who is independent, who can act as an advocate on their behalf, to whom they can speak in confidence, and raise concerns.

A further challenging characteristic of the culture of religious life was identified as secrecy. Relating this to the 'family-like' characteristics of religious orders, the leader of one men's order said:

> ***We deal in secrecy an awful lot...and within a religious order, you're constantly dealing with the whole person. We're not contractual employers of our members; we're brothers and sisters and so of course therefore that requires spaces of confidentiality where privacy can be respected. But on the other hand...we're also governed by a trap of secrecy that is not healthy.***

Several people described going to a community leader to express concerns about someone, and either no action being taken, or no information being made available to them about follow-up. Such cultures of secrecy often led to members of a community only finding out what their brothers or sisters had been accused of through external sources such as the media, or the IICSA report. A monk explained how, even though the cases were anonymised, he recognised the description of one member of his community whose offences were detailed in the IICSA report.

The members of a religious order have an unusual and complex relationship with the order and with those who represent it in leadership.

Outdated aspects of initial formation

The religious women and men who raised concerns with us about initial formation for religious as postulants, novices and juniors, were largely those who entered religious life forty or fifty years ago, so in exploring these perspectives we note that these are very much historical perspectives and that the situation now has changed out of all recognition in many congregations. However, it is still worth exploring this issue as the situation has not changed as much as we would have hoped in all communities.

The religious who talked about initial formation described an idealised view of what happens when people enter religious life. A religious priest and an enclosed nun talked about the failure of initial formation to take into account the reality of human sinfulness as it applies to priests and religious, who are flawed human beings like everyone else. This approach to formation was based on a theological understanding of religious life as aiming for perfection and equating this with holiness. This thinking, which still sometimes pervades, encouraged individuals to see their consecration as placing them above others, as well as encouraging deference towards them from others. A younger religious priest felt that this understanding of religious life continues to leave juniors and young religious vulnerable to these distortions, leading to a fragile sense of self based on a belief in religious life as a superior state of life. Decades after the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the universal call to holiness, and Pope Francis's more recent teachings on holiness as a condition found in and attainable by all, this idea lingers.[55]

They also commented on inadequate preparation for a mature, relational life which is lived in community. A priest and former religious spoke of how his former congregation had failed to prepare novices and juniors to be in relationship. The formation was, he said, ***'anti-relational'*** and ***'too intellectual'***. He referred to the practice which was very common in religious life until the early years following the Second Vatican Council, of discouraging what were called ***'particular friendships'***. One of the concerns with ***'particular friendships'*** was the potential for creating exclusive relationships in a community, possibly causing difficulty for the community dynamic. But this practice failed to recognise that mature, open and adult friendships can make a significant contribution to psychosexual and emotional maturity and stable behaviour.

Despite these more challenging and negative accounts of initial formation, we did hear how approaches to forming novices and junior religious have changed, particularly over the last thirty years. Two religious with significant leadership experience, one male and one female, spoke about their initial formation, which would have taken place in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Both accounts emphasised that the novice or formation directors were very open about sexuality and relationships. Psychosexual and human formation issues were addressed in terms of personal relationships, rather than as theoretical moral and ethical questions to be studied. The religious sister noted that the environment was conducive to open discussions about sexuality. The male religious said:

I think it would be hard to come out of the experience that I'd had, and say it was a culture of oppression or there was an anti-sexual element and anti-body or anything like that, and since those have been the sorts of problems that have often led to instances of abuse, I think we were very lucky.

Both are grateful for having been exposed to such rich and generative models of how to live religious life in community.

In relation to safeguarding, both these religious acknowledged that in the 1980s and 1990s religious orders were far less aware than they are now about the dangers of and possibilities for abusive relationships. They reflected that even though their initial formation was open and generative, there was no explicit coverage or awareness of the risk of abuse and no exploration of safeguarding as intrinsic to their life and mission.

Most of the changes in approaches to initial formation have come about as the result of a combination of different factors: changes in theology of religious life following the Second Vatican Council; religious orders embracing the growth of insights into psychological and emotional development over the last seventy years; the increasing average age and falling numbers of new entrants to religious life, and other factors. We encountered one example of a community whose approach to both initial and ongoing formation has changed quite radically in the light of the experience of child sexual abuse committed by their members. These changes form a significant cornerstone in the community's drive to address their own internal culture and provide better, more appropriate formation to those entering.

4. Pathways to change

Recognising the systemic abuse in cultures and structures

A crucial step in working towards change is to recognise that abuse can sometimes be systemically embedded in the culture and structures of an order. An individual religious congregation can be described as a system within itself: a set of aspects or elements which work together as parts of a larger, more complex whole. Several religious we interviewed identified both internal and external aspects of a religious order, and the connections between them as part of the whole. One example of this is where the leader of a women's community identified a link between a culture and behaviours of internal bullying of members in communities and external bullying and emotional and psychological abuse in the congregations' schools. A monk described at length a culture of what he called 'systemic abuse' in his own order which can, in turn, affect external facing aspects of religious life:

When there's abuse in one area of community life, the entire system ends up suffering abuse. The entire system ends up abusive.... where people aren't engaging in satisfying relationships, where they're seeking relationships elsewhere, where they're not dealing with their own psycho-sexual maturation, where they're unwilling to be held

accountable by anyone or to be questioned in any way. The effect is going to be, in the end, you just can't even sit down and have a pleasant conversation together.

Unless there is open and honest willingness to explore systemic issues, there is a risk that changes made will not be sufficient.

From resistance to conversion

Several religious talked about the resistance within their own communities to making the kind of changes that might bring about a healthier internal culture and relationships in community. One monk described the impact of being investigated by the IICSA on his community initially as paralysing. He felt that the community was still in denial and largely unable to speak about the abuse openly, due to fear and shame. Interestingly, this community has undergone several years of facilitated change processes and yet this monk believed that deeper change is still not seen as a priority. A contrasting outsider perspective on the same community came from another monk who has witnessed positive changes taking place, albeit in small steps, but significant in terms of how the monks are now able to relate to each other. He described how *'the quality of their communication has changed dramatically'* in recreation and generally around the monastery.

Change can also be difficult for those in leadership, when the rest of the congregation is not ready to move with them. A provincial leader received little support from the leadership team when first dealing with allegations of abuse and the ensuing criminal investigations: *'I was sending them reports and they were barely responding. So, I was a bit disillusioned by my own community and thinking if this is really true, why aren't we more concerned about it?'* As is the case with many religious orders, their generalate or international headquarters is located in Europe, in a country where the dominant culture is not yet as sensitised to issues of abuse as the UK has become. It has, in turn, been hard for leaders at international level to understand the pressures on those in leadership at province, country or regional level. This leader spoke of the loneliness of this struggle and at one point felt so disillusioned as to consider leaving religious life altogether. However, the leader conceded that this has now changed, largely due to *'kicking and screaming'*; the experience of their members in the UK has been a catalyst for that change throughout the congregation internationally.

Another religious, a former provincial leader in her congregation, described feeling as if she were banging her head against a brick wall in encouraging her sisters to understand and accept the need for compliance with safeguarding procedures. Effecting change from within has been difficult for these religious, but they have stayed committed to the task. But one priest who was a survivor of abuse as a young adult in a noviciate felt so defeated by the refusal of leaders in his congregation to accept the levels of risk he was identifying and to deal with a known offender that he decided to leave the order. He felt blamed by his brothers in the order for being a *'victim'* himself but also for trying to tell the truth and *'slander'*, as many saw it, a particular priest who was highly regarded.

Recognising specific contexts for women religious

Some sisters felt that many women religious haven't really encountered or had to engage with the issue of child sexual abuse. In England and Wales, the majority are now elderly and no longer working in the church or wider community. They may be socially isolated and largely ignorant about the issue. Until recently they have been able to regard it as someone else's problem. In the last few years, they have been realising that the issue does impact upon them and cannot be ignored.

In the past, religious may also have been disadvantaged by the model of safeguarding which is allegations-based, centred on codes of conduct, standards and compliance. Not only are women religious less often directly affected by this issue, but this weighting of the system towards allegations meant that it overlooked the broader issues such as bullying and protection of elderly members in women's religious orders. Abuse and safeguarding, particularly in women's communities, are experienced in terms of other issues such as care of their most vulnerable members, whether nursing is provided internally or where external carers are brought in. Sisters, particularly those who have lived together for many years in stable enclosed communities, can be reluctant to see their caring relationships as potential places for bullying and abuse. Safeguarding procedures such as having to be DBS checked for looking after members of your community can feel deeply intrusive.

The establishment of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service has marked a step forward in this regard. Over 200 religious communities and congregations have joined the service, which works as an independent professional team providing training, advice and support, including help with managing cases when concerns or allegations come to light. The RLSS has a different role to that of the CSSA, which is the regulatory body for all Catholic institutions including dioceses and religious orders. The CSSA's work includes audit of religious congregations however, and adapting the audit model to the specific situation of religious communities is still a challenge. It is clear from several religious women who spoke to us that a 'one size fits all' model of assessing risk and of measuring compliance with standards on such matters as training does not work for all communities. At the same time, the risks are real. Authoritarian culture can still lead to abuse and some external scrutiny is important, particularly for enclosed congregations who may not yet have grasped the enormity of the abuse crisis in the Church.

5. Conclusion: Towards healthy communities

All the participants troubled by aspects of community life emphasised the role of healthy relational dynamics in combating all forms of abuse in religious life. Such dynamics are built on and help to sustain mature interpersonal relationships. They include conscious awareness of boundaries and the ability to identify and challenge secrecy and closed cultures. A priest and former religious identified the importance of good friendships as a safeguard, ***'helping build and grow your humanity... the chances of you acting out, I think, are probably helped if you have good, meaningful, adult friendships.***' In contrast to this however, a young religious brother pointed out how the virtue of friendships in his community had been distorted and had led to younger brothers being vulnerable to undue influence and spiritual manipulation through the 'friendship' of older members.

Several saw the need to tackle unhealthy community dynamics as urgent. A member of an enclosed women's community agreed with this perspective:

> ***Something like IICSA brings it home that it's actually very real and if we want a healthier congregation, healthy communities, then we've got to get on and help bring that about, start raising the issues, having the conversations, owning the mistakes.***

A monk also talked about how the changes in his community had been prompted firstly by the large number of allegations and incidents of abuse reported and growing awareness of the impact on victims but also by the impact this was having on individuals in the community itself.

Ideas about what constitutes a healthy community are complemented by evidence of other leaders and communities pushing through and embracing the changes needed. One leader of a men's congregation saw the challenge for them not in tackling internal dynamics but rather in developing their outreach to victims and survivors. He described their absolute acceptance of their role and complicity and the work needed in leading his members to work beyond a threshold of compliance. This has involved contacting survivors; inviting them into conversation; supporting initiatives for and with survivors and ***'not just fixating on what we need to do to comply'***. Another provincial leader spoke of the long journey that she and her community have been on, and the process, over several years, of turning around attitudes within the community and ***'carrying the pain'*** and learning how to live with this, facing up to and accepting what took place. Some are more able and willing to face the reality and accept the responsibility than others. The examples of real success in this area are characterised by an understanding of safeguarding having been cascaded across the congregation through relational work, inserted into reflection days and located in Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching or connected to other social justice concerns. All of these encourage greater involvement of the whole community of religious.

Religious communities are both part of the local church and also distinctive in how they live their particular charisms in diverse ministries and contemplative and monastic spaces. Their experience of the abuse crisis shares many themes with the previous chapter: concerns about the deeper dynamics that operate in how abuse happens and how victims and survivors are treated; concerns about the structures that have operated, particularly in the past, but sometimes still continuing today; concerns about culture and relationships, and about leadership and transparency. In the religious that spoke to us, there was also a deep honesty about facing up to areas of failure and recognising the scale of change and growth needed in their own congregations. Their desire was not simply that communities could come to terms with abuse and its aftermath, but more fundamentally about their fidelity to their calling.

A commitment to those who are wounded or vulnerable or have suffered injustice lies at the heart of what it means to live a consecrated life and mission. Many religious see themselves as called to be on the side of anyone who is poor or suffering and called also to prophetic witness, to speaking out about injustice and searching for the truth when harm has been done to people. Each congregation and each community does this in a different way, depending on their experience and drawing on their charism, the specific inspiration of the Holy Spirit in which they were founded. Each could have something immensely valuable to offer to victims and survivors and the whole Church on the journey of healing and repair.

Chapter Five

Resistance, hope and healing

1. Introduction: Perceptions of progress and tensions that continue

Although the voices speaking in this research were often filled with pain and sadness or were troubled and grieving, this was not the whole story. Among all the groups that spoke to us there were testimonies of resistance and courage and of compassionate response. There were stories of attitudes and actions that enable healing and growth for individuals and communities. This material was not as extensive as the narratives, perceptions and emotions detailing the impact of abuse and the experience of inadequate responses and mishandling, but it is still important. There were signs of hope and of a kind of maturing in understanding of what is asked of a faithful Christian community. There was also recognition among many participants that progress had been made in safeguarding practice, that Catholic communities and institutions are now almost always safer places. The overall picture that emerges is one of a Catholic community in which change is happening and understanding is growing; but with much yet to learn and to do. This change is also part of how the abuse crisis has had an impact on Catholic life, challenging habits and assumptions in a permanent way.

There was a consensus from many voices that safeguarding is now being taken seriously in most dioceses and religious orders. Systems are stronger, and the resources needed are in place, a diocesan officer said, and several safeguarding staff described elements of good practice they have been developing. The shift from diocesan safeguarding roles being held by priests to the appointment of professional qualified staff with backgrounds in fields such as social work and policing has been significant, although it has brought new complexities as incoming staff may have limited experience of Catholic life. This affirmation of progress was always accompanied by a recognition that becoming a safe and healthy church is a process which continues, with much more yet to be achieved. ***'We can continue to get better'***, said one diocesan safeguarding officer. Another safeguarding professional described her perception:

> ***I also think that, if you now go to a parish, we may not have got it totally right, but at a parish level, most people have got the word right, they've got something on a notice board, it's an awareness and if they see something wrong, they know who to take it to. Now that, I think, in the last, probably the last seven years, has been a massive step and a massive mind-set change, partly I think because so many things came out in the open, in the press. People now realise it is an issue, they could be looking for it and you need to be calling it out.***

The change of mindset was also seen, for some, in how those in leadership positions are more able to admit failure and apologise, and to act swiftly when needed. For one survivor, this suggests a change of heart as well as mind is underway. Several voices also pointed to bishops' willingness to meet survivors and listen to them. People involved in safeguarding spoke of one case where a bishop travelled to another city to meet a survivor, and of a bishop who spent time with a survivor in her late 80s who needed to talk.

Changing the mind-set of the Church is a slow process. There are also areas where tensions are still experienced. Whilst the bishops who took part in this research were clearly committed to listening to their safeguarding advisers and accepting their advice, safeguarding staff in a different diocese described a relatively recent experience of feeling powerless to compel decisions that they think are needed from diocesan leaders or to ask challenging questions. The recent review of safeguarding in Hexham and Newcastle Diocese by the CSSA addressed this particular issue strongly, indicating that this may still be a concern but also demonstrating that the CSSA will act swiftly and communicate transparently when concerns arise.[56]

There was also awareness of the risk of thinking the problem has now been solved, particularly as new policies are operating and new structures are in place following the Elliott Review. A young priest commented:

> ***I think there's that need to grow in self-awareness and not to rest on our laurels. I think a lot of good work has been done... a lot of good has been achieved but that good potentially risks us becoming complacent and thinking, oh we've actually weeded this issue out, when you can't weed it out, it's endemic .... Though those of us at the younger end of the spectrum have always perceived this as something historic, within a particular culture and a particular historical context, and when it manifests in the present day ... that makes it all the more shocking.***

Safeguarding at diocesan and local level is now using a standards-based approach, aimed at ensuring

The Elliott Review: Moving to a standards-based approach to safeguarding and to independent auditing.

The Elliott Review recommendations, published in September 2020, centred on measures to ensure that effective safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and that accountability is actively practised at all levels. The Review recommended the adoption of eight safeguarding standards against which all practice should be assessed. Compliance is then to be audited and reported on by an independent body. The recommendations also covered the responsibility of diocesan governance structures for ensuring good safeguarding practice. Each standard has a number of specific criteria which parishes, dioceses, religious communities and other Catholic groups and organisations can use to gather evidence to indicate progress in meeting the standard.

The Standards

1. Embed safeguarding in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry, and culture.
2. Communicate the Church's safeguarding message.
3. Engage with and care for those that report having been harmed.
4. Effectively manage allegations and concerns.
5. Manage and support subjects or allegations and concerns (respondents).
6. Implement robust human resource management.
7. Provide and access training and support for safeguarding.
8. Quality assure compliance to continuously improve practice.

that good practice is developed and continually improved. Some laypeople and some safeguarding staff in particular were aware that this approach brings new risks. A woman with experience of diocesan work explained:

> ***you might inadvertently fall into a CQC, you know, 'requires improvement' or a sort of hygiene scores on the doors type of attitude, oh we've got five or we've got four, which become, you stick it on the bottom of your emails and it doesn't become something that's really part of who you are and that you're putting it into practice.***

It was striking that several safeguarding professionals spoke about their commitment to a ***'relational approach'*** to their task or about finding an ***'ethical way of working'***. The elements of such an approach were described: being willing to seek advice; writing everything in a way that survivors can see; writing reflective letters to survivors so that there are no surprises; checking the accuracy of any recordings; and building personal relationships with all the priests. One diocesan safeguarding officer described this as ***'therapeutic'*** for the staff as well. A survivor who had experienced serious mishandling also acknowledged that ***'there are some good people'*** in Catholic safeguarding work.

Alongside the reform of policies and structures, participants described other initiatives to reach victims and offer resources and access to support. A leader of a male religious order described a new helpline inviting victims of abuse in any of the order's institutions to come forward; a healing retreat programme, From Grief to Grace, has been working since 2011, assisted by the use of a house from a religious order.[57] At the national level, the Catholic Church, through the Bishops' Conference, and the Church of England, have set up *Safe Spaces*, an independent support agency for victims of abuse related to either Church.[58]

2. A Gospel based approach

A further sign of hope was found in a desire expressed by many voices for a Gospel-centred response to the questions asked of the Church by the abuse crisis. This was seen as particularly important in relation to institutional response to victims and survivors. In Chapter Two, a heartfelt expression of this from a bishop is included (see p. 59). A safeguarding officer concurred:

> ***If as Catholics, we don't start off with, with being compassionate, with reaching out, with wanting to protect people who are vulnerable, with ensuring that we call out injustice which is what this is, without that,there's no point in having a standards base.***

A survivor expressed what this meant to him:

> ***There's a bit in the Gospel that says, what father among you, if your son asked for bread, would hand him a snake? It's got to be a response that strips away the levels of power and allows survivors to actually confront the person who is their pastor.***

A female leader of a religious community also spoke strongly about this:

> ***It should be part of our guts that if somebody comes in, whether it's in a confessional or whether it's otherwise and says to you, you know, something terrible has happened to me, as humans and Christians, the response isn't to look up a policy and see, what do I do now? You know, it's more, it's a hug.***

The tension to which these comments point is between a defensive institutional response and a response which is experienced as authentically rooted in Christian faith. This tension still exists, particularly for bishops and leaders of religious communities who feel constrained by legal responsibilities or by advice from insurers, as described in earlier chapters. But there are bishops and leaders of religious communities who have resisted institutional defensiveness and given priority to a conscience-based response. One bishop said:

> ***I take the view that you must do what you think is right and to a large extent, respond with spirit and heart, before you respond with mind and legal judgement. If someone is presenting to you as in pain and in suffering, you don't go off and do tests to see if they're really in pain and suffering, you take what measures you can to relieve that pain and suffering.***

Several research participants spoke about the need for a theologically based understanding of safeguarding. For several religious in particular, and also for some safeguarding staff, there was unease that the term 'safeguarding' has been adopted from secular social work culture and brought into 'the heart of the Church' when the Church does in fact have a deeper rationale and motivation which enable a richer concept. For a leader of a women's religious congregation:

> ***There's a complete lack of spirituality and theology under it... it's not a Catholic Christian procedure until it's underpinned by Gospel values... until it becomes a system that touches our hearts and ceases to be a set of tick boxes, it's not going to be truly about the Church. It's not going to touch the hearts of the Church; it's going to simply make sure that our behaviour is correct.***

It is a sign of broader awareness of this deeper rationale that the *Elliott Review* report introduction began from a theological view of safeguarding, titled The Dignity of the Person and the Safeguarding Vocation. There is now more frequent discussion of how safeguarding principles reflect and emerge from Christian faith and Catholic social teaching.

For a safeguarding professional who works with religious communities, the important element is that protecting people, putting in place barriers that stop wrong behaviour is ***'part of reaching out, of helping people who are vulnerable, who can't help themselves and it's back to a basic concept of what the religious do, which is working with the vulnerable and speaking out for the voiceless'***.

One further encouraging sign here is small but important. Several participants spoke about their involvement in safeguarding and/or advocacy for survivors in terms of a personal sense of mission, or they described responses to parish situations which might be termed

The approach of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)

The Religious Life Safeguarding Service describes its purpose in terms which resonate with a Gospel based approach. Its statement of purpose begins ***'We believe we can create a safer Church by putting victims at the centre of safeguarding and developing an empathy-driven culture.'***[59] The code for religious, *Integrity in Ministry*, mentioned in Chapter One, sets out principles of behaviour based on Christian faith, including this: ***'Religious witness God's love for every human person by sensitivity, reverence and respect in their relationships'***.

'ministry'. In the latter case, a parish group described their willingness to provide support circles for people when an allegation of inappropriate behaviour had been made, but not proven, so that they could continue to belong to the parish. They felt they could manage the risks involved, if they had been allowed to do so. A diocesan safeguarding officer described her work in vocational terms: ***'I feel that my safeguarding work comes from a place of faith and of mission'***; for her, safeguarding work is part of ***'trying to make the Church the community of faith that I feel we're called to be'***. At the level of parish safeguarding representatives, the perspective of ministry is very strong when they describe their experience, although this role is rarely recognised as a ministry alongside other ministries that the baptised exercise. Listening to one parish safeguarding representative describe a sensitive, relational approach to those who come to her, and hearing how much care she took to enable people to trust her, and even how on occasion she wept with people, it was clear that what was happening was not simply concerned with DBS checks and form-filling, but powerfully compassionate. When carried out in this way, the role becomes a ministry as well as an essential duty fulfilled.

3. The Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse

Comparatively few participants spoke about the Day of Prayer, an initiative of Pope Francis that was adopted by the bishops for England and Wales, taking place in the fifth week after Easter each year. Resources for prayer and liturgies have been developed by a group commissioned by the Bishops' Conference, the Isaiah Journey Group. All Catholic communities, including parishes, dioceses and religious orders, are invited to take part.[60]

A diocesan safeguarding co-ordinator saw the Day of Prayer as a ***'golden opportunity'***, but she saw little evidence that it is being taken seriously. Others wondered whether people even knew it was supposed to happen. A woman with experience at both parish and diocesan level who was also a survivor and a member of her local parish council expressed the need for such a day ***'where we pray and we fast, or we do something that says, we acknowledge this hurt and we're asking God for forgiveness and healing … it's only a symbol but it's a very important witness to say, we're taking responsibility.'*** When told that such a Day of Prayer was already meant to happen, she observed that ***'it was never brought to our attention'***.

When the Day of Prayer is celebrated well, it clearly has an impact. A parish safeguarding representative described how it provided an opportunity for survivors to disclose experience of abuse, if they wished, and to be offered pastoral care:

> ***We used the literature that had been sent to us, and we adapted this literature, and we, [the priest] and I, stood outside at the end, well, inside because it was raining, but just inside the door, just in case, we said, if anybody wants to say anything to us or wants to have a word***

A diocesan safeguarding officer described her work in vocational terms: 'I feel that my safeguarding work comes from a place of faith and of mission'; for her, safeguarding work is part of 'trying to make the Church the community of faith that I feel we're called to be'.

or, in private or anything, we're there at the end. And one Eucharistic minister just came and said, quite openly, he said, I was abused and I said, I didn't know because he'd never told me, and he wouldn't have told me, because he'd never come and so I just said, oh okay, thanks for telling me that, have you got support, and he said, yes, I'm seeing a psychiatrist, and that was enough.

In a parish that had been directly affected by the conviction and imprisonment of a priest who had worked there, and where emotions were still 'raw', the Day of Prayer had particular value and meaning. One woman with wide experience described how at first she was reluctant to go, but found it *'wonderful, and I felt a kind of weight had been lifted'*.

For those who are aware of it, and those for whom the issue of abuse is 'raw', not just individuals but also communities, the Day of Prayer is important. But there was a sense for others that more leadership is needed to explain its importance and meaning and encourage parishes to take part. One of the smaller but definite signs of hope that could be discerned across all the groups who took part in this research is the desire for prayer and for some sort of repentance, the need to *'acknowledge all our sins'*, as one woman explained. The Day of Prayer is not the only way this can happen; but it is a valuable opportunity in which the whole Catholic community can reflect prayerfully on this experience.

4. Acts of resistance

There were many accounts in the data of individual acts of courage and resistance in which both priests and laypeople challenged aspects of how allegations were being mishandled and victims were being failed by insensitive or inadequate responses.

Sometimes this is personal action. One participant described writing a letter to a bishop to challenge specific mishandling. Others wrote letters calling for Cardinal Nichols to resign. Another stopped her direct debit and wrote to the bishop to explain why, diverting her support to justice and peace work. A religious priest challenged his order in relation to an appointment of a priest who had abused adult novices including himself. A victim decided to (physically) fight back against the priest who abused him in his school. Several people in safeguarding roles described decisions to whistle-blow or speak transparently in public about mishandling. A priest described speaking in public about believing a victim's account and being attacked by other priests. There is a strong sense of moral conscience in these acts, but also hints of isolation. It is not easy to step out of line, particularly for office-holders.

There is also an element of resistance in those who have expressed solidarity with victims and survivors. A survivors' group described how they felt encouraged when several diocesan justice and peace groups advocated on their behalf after initially being defensive:

for them to take an interest in our experience was deeply gratifying and I know that some of them, you know, have written directly to the [relevant religious] order and asked them to account for their behaviour towards us.

Resistance becomes more powerful when it is a communal act or practice. A survivor who was a member of a group described below told how he had explained to his parish priest that the religious order in whose care he had been abused would benefit from an annual collection taken in the parish for missionary work overseas. In response, and despite pressure from his bishop not to do this, the parish priest explained the case to the parish community and asked if they wished to have the collection take place, and they decided they did not. When communities or groups are invited to discern what is right and how to act in particular circumstances, their instincts reveal a fine sense of justice.

The resistance stories in this research were not just concerned with direct mishandling or injustice in how survivors have been treated. They also covered resistance to the cultural attitudes associated with clericalism and damaging theology, areas that are explored in detail in Chapter Six. A survivor described standing up in church to argue with a priest who described *'a punishing God'* and who preached that all non-Catholics are damned. A woman refused to use titles in a church-related group setting. Even small actions begin to unpick cultural habits that contribute to a tolerance of abuse. Resistance is not easy or natural for Catholics. One female survivor described the Irish-influenced culture in which she grew up: *'we're not supposed to fight, we're not supposed to take the law into our own hands, we're not supposed to tell the teacher'*.

5. Survivors' voices and activism

The narratives of survivors' voices and activism also describe resistance as well as courage and truth-telling. Their impact was acknowledged by many who spoke to us. In the words of a bishop: *'the real game changer for me, and it's one for which I'm profoundly grateful, is the continuing of the growing impact of survivors and them finding a voice'*. Several people understood well that listening to survivors is not only concerned with their need to be believed and supported. It is equally about what the whole Church needs to hear and how the whole church needs to learn to listen. Another bishop, speaking about the leadership of Pope Francis in this area, commented:

And I think he demonstrates to us, bishops, priests, that this is central to his pastoral mission, to meet with victim survivors; they are the Church; they're teaching us something, and we have to accept them as teachers that the Lord is sending to us.

A priest who is also a survivor extended this insight: *'They're telling us more than just about sexual abuse. They are telling us something about the structures of power in the Church and how it works'*. Another bishop reminded us that listening to survivors helps us not only in how we respond to instances of abuse; equally, he said, *'It will impact on the way we listen to everybody.'*

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The real game changer for me, and it's one for which I'm profoundly grateful, is the continuing of the growing impact of survivors and them finding a voice.

Survivors described ways they had chosen to resist being silenced or disbelieved and actions they had taken to seek justice or recognition. Some had written blogs or memoirs or transmuted their experience into other creative forms. Some had confronted their abusers decades on from the abuse. Some had launched legal action as a result of the institutional denial of their experience. One group of survivors who had all been abused in the same Catholic institution described a campaign over many years to seek justice in the form of acknowledgement and apology from the religious order concerned. They enlisted leaders at all levels of the Church before finally it took papal influence to compel an adequate response from the order's leadership.

Another survivor described how he realised that he had to turn his anger into *'something useful'*, and found out where his abuser's grave was, intending to deface his headstone with graffiti. He saw this as achieving *'a catharsis'*, but then realised he did not need to do this because *'I now have the power over him. Everything is, well, surprise, surprise, everything's ultimately about power.'* Another described a sense of mission: *'I think it's a mission really, it's something I would want to engage in for the rest of my life'*... *'there's a strong message to be got over there, and for me, it's a lifelong devotion really to make sure that that lesson is learned.'*

Survivors' activism is not only oriented towards their own experience and their need for acknowledgement and some kind of care or redress. For many of those that took part in this research, it then extends into advocacy and action on issues that affect others and on reforms that are needed. Some survivors find this advocacy role valuable. A senior safeguarding leader reflected that:

> *A couple of survivors have said to me, when I have to speak about my own case, I feel very drained, I feel very down, I feel quite, I struggle with it. When I'm speaking about how things can be different, I'm energised, it gives me a buzz.*

The survivors group already mentioned who sought acknowledgement of their experience and enlisted the Pope were also motivated by the need to ensure that the order was taking safeguarding seriously:

> *They're dealing with children all over the place, I want them to be aware of what happened to us and [so that] it doesn't happen to children in places like Africa, South America, Central America, where conditions are the same as they were in Britain in the sixties and seventies. The protection of children isn't there.*

A female survivor described her decision to try to help a Catholic institution with their safeguarding work, as part of her efforts not to be defined by her abuse and to overcome her desire to condemn all parts of the Church: *'I would have been cross with myself if I hadn't have tried to change things as well, if I'd allowed things to carry on and not said anything. I've done too much of that and then regretted it.'* For this survivor, participation was hard but *'it was part of me healing as well.'* Survivors who are ready for this work offer informed and reflective insights and suggestions which contribute to the healing of the Church as well as their own healing.

Other survivors became involved in advising the Elliott Review panel or in aspects of implementing its recommendations. Some have also been involved in encounters and training for bishops and the priests and deacons in their dioceses. There are sensitive questions here for both survivors and those who recognise the importance of their voices. The role they could play in training for example, is immensely valuable, including in priestly formation where their voices are not currently directly heard. A fairly recently ordained priest felt that not having been able to listen to 'live' survivor voices during his formation (although written texts of survivor experiences may be used in counselling training) left him ***'impoverished'***. But the expectation that survivors should continually be willing to recount their experience so that others can learn risks asking them to re-enter traumatic memories so that others can learn and could be seen or felt as exploitative. A safeguarding office-holder explained her awareness of this:

> ***A survivor described it to me as, every time he has to speak about it or write about it, it's a bit like, you know the scene in Harry Potter, where he has to write his lines and it comes out like a pen on the back of his hand, and he's left with that bleeding scar, it's like that.***

Some survivors are very willing to do this; others may be willing, but not necessarily at the right stage in their own healing process. It can be difficult for survivors and those who accompany them or seek their help to work through the discernment needed. The well-being of survivors is always the first priority but it also matters to welcome their desire to play a part in training and reform.

6. Compassionate response: parish communities affected by a case of abuse

One of the strong messages from this research is about recognising the impact on whole communities when they are directly affected by a case of abuse in their context or by the suspension, arrest or imprisonment of a priest whose ministry they have received. This impact has been described in Chapter Two. In this chapter, we draw some reflections from priests and other parish members about what enables a community to respond with courage and appropriate honesty and care, based on their faith.

In this area, there is little to guide priests and parish leaders. There do not seem to be any accessible published resources or guidance that describe how to communicate with and accompany affected parish communities, although it was clear that among the research participants there were laypeople and priests who had insight and wisdom from direct experience. Their reflections illuminate good practice and point to some principles which can guide response. In order to safeguard the anonymity of the parishes concerned, we present their experience as examples of good practice when a parish is directly affected by the arrest or conviction of a priest who has worked with them.

The first principle which guides compassionate response to communities is simple: a recognition that the parish community deserves to know as much as possible as soon as possible and to be given time and space to accept, understand and grieve or lament over a painful knowledge. The greatest possible degree of transparency is essential. Revealing what has happened is a complex process with various stages, and timing and availability of information may be determined in part by criminal justice proceedings. In one parish experience, we heard how swiftly news of an arrest spread on social media, so that some people heard about it ahead of the planned parish communication. In another case, the sudden unexplained disappearance of a priest led to rumours and distress.

- Those who lead the parish and its connected schools -- priests, deacons, head teachers and pastoral and administrative staff -- need to know first. It matters hugely at this point that *all* involved in pastoral leadership or parish employment find out together at the same time because they will all play key roles in handling how the parish community responds. It is also crucial to explain what is known and what is not known or what cannot be shared, and to explain why some information cannot be given.

- There will need to be carefully planned communication first to the whole parish community and then also to ecumenical and other partners. Parish leaders, either priests or others, need to tell the mass-going community what has happened and what they know and don't know and why, again including an explanation of what cannot be shared. This is probably best done at Sunday Mass, which in practice may mean co-ordinating across several churches if the parish is a cluster or partnership of churches. It is also crucial that priests and other parish leaders are available after Mass so that they can hear and respond to the initial shock and sadness and understand what questions people have.

  Even if the disclosure relates to a priest who left the parish some time ago, or who has served elsewhere in the diocese, a parish community may still be affected. One crucial element of good practice is for someone from the parish to be aware of anyone in the parish who is a victim or survivor of abuse (which may not be connected to the Catholic Church) for whom the news may trigger fresh pain, and to offer advance warning of the disclosure and offer support. A priest who had to lead a parish disclosure explained: ***'there may be people you need to speak to before the announcement's made.... I gave them advance warning, so they either could choose not to be in church or to be in church.'***

A second principle is the importance of listening. Following the initial communication, it is important to offer spaces for people to talk and ask questions and feel that they are being listened to. This could happen in existing parish groups or regular meetings or in gatherings set up for this purpose. Whilst raw feelings and questions may emerge soon after people have heard the news, the shock and other painful emotions will continue or may re-emerge later on. There may be stories in the media which re-open their painful feelings or anniversaries or events which bring back the questions raised.

It is tempting to think that the task here is for parish leaders, usually the priests, to listen to the parish members, the baptised. But there are other ways of seeing the task of listening. It was clear from one parish experience described to us that listening had been mutual and reciprocal; priests and other pastoral leaders and anyone else who works for or with the parish also need to talk about their feelings and reactions.

Two other possible forms of listening may be needed. In some situations, parish members may need to express their feelings to someone from the diocese. If there is anger or if larger questions are raised by their particular experience, it matters that they are able to speak to those who work at other levels of authority and feel that they are listened to. And it is always valuable to consider whether there are some for whom the disclosure has been deeply disturbing or triggered other memories or emotions and they need professional help.

A third principle is to consider how to bring the distress and pain the community is experiencing into its communal prayer. The annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors is an opportunity which can be used, but there may be a need for something more immediate. The resources produced by the Isaiah Journey can be adapted in many different ways. They include a parish retreat session, a Service of Sorrow and Acknowledgement of Abuse, material for a prayer vigil with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and other materials.

As already noted, for many Catholics who view the world with the eyes of faith, the experience of coming to terms with abuse in the Church brings a need to lament or even repent, on behalf of the whole body of believers. Others may be caught in anger or deep confusion, but these too may contain a desire for justice or accountability that comes from faith. All these emotions and instincts open up the possibility of a faith-filled response. If parish leaders can notice or draw out these needs and desires, communities can discover a path to growth as well as healing.

Disclosure and parish relationships and maturity

As we pieced together what could be learned from different parish experiences, both negative and positive, we noticed a pattern. How disclosure of a priest's arrest or offence is handled in a parish is likely to be an expression of the relationships and ethos of the parish. How it is arranged and how people are invited to respond will express more than just a reaction to difficult news. It will express how priests and people work together and care for each other and what kind of culture and faith life the parish has.

It was evident from our listening that when relationships between priests and people are collaborative, open and based on a sense of equality, a parish disclosure is made easier by and deepens those relationships. The right kind of disclosure process can build rather than damage trust. Most importantly, if relationships are good, people are more able to respond *from faith*. In one experience of disclosure, where such relationships existed and had long characterised the parish community, the responses

expressed sadness, generosity and care, and pondered questions of shared responsibility.

If relationships are less open or lay leadership and collaborative working is less developed, and attitudes are more passive and unquestioning, people may hear the news in a more isolated way and be less able to navigate and process the feelings raised by what they have learned. If people sense that information is being withheld, they lose trust and difficult emotions are reinforced. In one parish where information about a previous priest's offences was not well communicated, there was sadness and some cynicism.

It matters too how priests are open about what they have felt and thought as they absorbed what had happened. In Chapter Two we explored the impact of abuse cases on priests, and in Chapter Six, we explore the underlying habits of clericalism which are implicated. In a parish disclosure experience, priests can choose to be open about the impact on their own faith and on their ministry and to share their emotions, whether of grief, incomprehension or vulnerability. When parish relationships are such that priests feel safe to do this, people will almost always respond with generosity and care. They will also feel more able to express their own feelings. Then the parish as a community is more able to take the experience into their life of prayer and to grow in healthy relationships.

It was evident from our listening that when relationships between priests and people are collaborative, open and based on a sense of equality, a parish disclosure is made easier by and deepens those relationships. The right kind of disclosure process can build rather than damage trust.

What happens afterwards

After listening to different parish experiences of receiving a disclosure about a priest they knew, a further challenge emerged. It is tempting to assume that when some time has passed, the impact has diminished or disappeared. The voices we heard suggest that this is not what happens. The impact becomes part of the parish story and part of people's personal faith journeys. It is important that it is not buried. This matters particularly when the priest or priests who serve the parish change; people need to know that what has happened, and its impact, is recognised and understood by any new priests or new pastoral leaders that come. It was encouraging to hear from a priest who had moved to a parish that had experienced a disclosure that his bishop had been *'very much aware of the lingering pain and upset that is there'.*

There is a generative resource too in these experiences. It is possible that in some parishes, the aftermath might include a sense of the need to listen to survivors or to explore how to develop ministries of care and support. It might lead to expressions of solidarity with survivors or groups working for change. It might also lead to questions about such matters as seminary formation or accountability in the Church which people want to explore. We return to this area in Chapter Eight.

7. Compassionate response to victims and survivors

Although all the survivors who took part in this research had experienced poor responses when they disclosed their abuse or made allegations to office-holders in Catholic institutions, some had also found individuals or places associated with Catholic faith that provided care and accompaniment that they found helpful. The crucial threshold for several survivors was when someone believed them. One survivor described a conversation with a priest during a parish walk:

> *There was something that made it different, that I felt that, I think it was the comment of, I know what your dad's like, made all the difference. Because... that just made the difference, and it was like, he might believe me, I might trust, suss this out. It was a glimmer of hope.*

Later when she reached a crisis point, she contacted him again, and told him her full story:

> *It was the first person I'd ever told about any of the things that had ever happened to me. And he just said, he was proud of me and as simple as that, it was, it was so, it was really simple but very effective.... it's about trust and he didn't tell me that, he never said I'd done anything wrong, he just said, that shouldn't have happened and I'm sorry that happened to you, well done and, and I'm always, and it was that opening.*

Another survivor who had experienced denial by the institution in which he was abused, and later mishandling when he asked another relevant institution to investigate and press for a response, described the impact of a meeting with a bishop from a different diocese. He spoke of the sensitivity, openness and transparency that the bishop had shown, which enabled the survivor to trust him despite knowing how hard he found it to trust men. He recalled saying to him: *'here I am, handing over to you and trusting you with an issue, to deal with an issue that has been the most life-changing and life-affecting issue that has ever affected me'*. He took away from the encounter a sense of having an ally, a relationship which meant a great deal to him.

A priest with experience of working with survivors proposed an important principle, that there should be spaces of care for survivors that are independent of the institutional Church. Describing his work, he said:

> *I think that we have a big advantage in terms of working with clerical abuse survivors, that we're not seen as an arm of the Bishops Conference. You know, we're actually one stage removed and so I think people, for that reason, can trust us in a way that it's quite different from going to say a diocesan safeguarding person, where you sort of feel, rightly or wrongly, often wrongly, you know, based on the sort of paranoia that somehow they're part of the establishment.*

There were not enough of these 'glimmers of hope' in the experience of the survivors who spoke in this research, but there were some. They were also evident in how safeguarding staff spoke about the 'ethical approach' to safeguarding described earlier, and in how some office-holders spoke about survivors they had met or in whose cases they had had some involvement. The sense of compassion and of justice owed was evident in

the desire of a couple of office-holders to increase the compensation payments to victims. Another safeguarding office-holder spoke with deep sympathy and understanding of the hurt caused by mishandling and of a deep personal commitment to engagement with survivors.

It was striking that when we asked, in interviews, whether participants could describe examples of good practice in safeguarding, few could give any examples. Yet there were many small narratives in which people went beyond the formality of policies or the appropriate distancing associated with professionalism and became personally and compassionately involved with survivors. For those involved in pastoral ministry, this seems obvious, giving priority to a pastoral and Gospel based response, as described earlier. For others, those in professional roles in Catholic settings, it is a choice or an invitation. The Church has learned from this crisis the value of professionalism; we are still learning how best to balance its high standards with instincts ultimately rooted in the Gospel.

We also found that few of the priests who contributed to this research had had the opportunity to sit and listen in person to victims and survivors. One priest, a monk, spoke of how his desire to respond in some way led him to seek training in appropriate skills, but he had never been called upon to use them. Whilst some priests may find this area difficult, many others would offer deep compassion and accompaniment. Some religious also spoke of the desire to support survivors. One religious sister described it this way:

> ***People have obviously felt safe with us, because of being women, I suppose, and I imagine our way of life must give us a sense of depth I think, with the, our prayer life and community life, so I've certainly heard of some sisters who have been extremely supportive of victim survivors and I suspect that there may be more who are being discreet about it and giving the support because sometimes if the person (is) sharing deeply about their pain and experience, they will want to know it was being held in one place.***

Another female religious pointed out that this is delicate work, describing it as ***'very hard terrain for people to enter into correctly... using the right language, taking the right tone, asking the right questions. It's almost a specialist, you know, you need an extra sensitivity.'***

8. Conclusion: Glimmers of hope

The data considered in this chapter points towards another perspective on the abuse crisis which stands alongside the trauma, pain and mishandling. There are many people, lay, religious and ordained, across the whole Church who deeply desire to offer a response that comes first of all from the resources of Catholic faith and the Gospel. The necessity of identifying and operating strong safeguarding policies modelled on wider good practice may sometimes distract from awareness of such instincts, and they have been slow to emerge. But they do exist, at every level, alongside and sometimes within the hard work and chastening experience of learning and adopting safeguarding practices. The courage of survivors also plays an indispensable part in calling the Church to be what it should be, a place of compassion and healing.

Chapter Six

Catholic culture and the structures of our common life

1. Introduction: The child abuse crisis as a catalyst for change

The child abuse crisis raises crucial questions for all of us in the Catholic community. Some of these questions relate directly to how the abuse was allowed to happen in the first place. Others arise from the failures in our response and from what we need to learn about ourselves.

Why have so many survivors felt betrayed or abandoned by Catholic institutions or leaders?

Why has it been so difficult for office-holders and others to listen to and believe survivors?

How far is the whole Catholic community involved in what has gone wrong?

Which of our structures or systems are implicated in how the abuse crisis has happened? Why has the Church's response to victims and survivors so often failed to reflect the Gospel?

What does this ongoing crisis tell us about the cultures and relationships within the community of faith?

How can we restore or heal what has been broken, most of all for survivors and others directly affected, but also for the whole Catholic community?

The assumption underlying this research is that we need to explore these and other questions by examining some of the relationships, attitudes and practices that make up the culture of our parishes and communities. These relationships and habits can be understood as the structures of our common life. Frequently they are also systemic, meaning they arise from and are embedded in a larger system of thinking and ideas that influence all aspects of Catholic life. They reflect, or sometimes fail to reflect, Catholic teaching about the Church, its ministries and its mission.

Such exploration is difficult, sensitive and painful. It is clear from some of the voices we heard and from reactions when we described this research in various settings that many people would prefer not to think about, or even know about, the child abuse crisis. This reflects a range of reactions. Some would rather it was brushed under the carpet because it is so distressing to think about and disturbs their sense of the Church as a place of refuge from the world. ***'I think the hurt has been greater in the Church because it is the one area where people didn't expect this',*** a priest from a directly affected parish said. Some laypeople have simply been unable to believe that abuse has happened because of how they see priests as 'special', as icons of Christ. Others may avoid it because they feel powerless to do anything about it. A different response was suggested by a laywoman: ***'there would be a sense where it's not our responsibility to take action here, it's the bishops, you know.'***

But this was not the only story. There were also many voices that expressed a different view, a willingness to recognise and learn from this crisis and discern its meaning. These voices use words such as ***'catalyst'*** and ***'necessity'*** to characterise what has happened. For one woman,

What we mean by 'structures', 'habits' and 'culture'

We use the terms 'structures', 'practices' and 'habits' interchangeably in this text. Parish life is made up of many structures and practices. Some are small; addressing priests using their title or asking permission before putting up a notice, for example, or how music is planned. Others are institutional: finance committees and parish councils, and structures which join the local community to the wider Church, including the appointment of priests to the parish and the requirements of safeguarding policy.

All these and other structures and practices are embedded in parish cultures, in the relationships, attitudes and assumptions we carry. Some are governed by the Church's law which is determined (and sometimes changed) by the Pope; many are not and can change more easily. The culture in each parish, diocese or religious community is unique to that body, whilst sharing many aspects.

'I think this is probably the most important thing to happen to the Church, do you know, I think the church would never have fundamentally changed that, the way that it has had to, without this event.' She continues: *'it's a process of harsh and painful and humiliating change but actually it's necessary because, you know, the pride and power and status prevented it from evolving.'* A leader of a women's religious community saw this experience as *'purification… bringing a haughty Church down to its knees'.*

It was not just women who spoke in this way. A lay man saw it as calling for a stripping out of false securities. A priest commented that *'no matter how painful this situation is, the fact that it's broken might be a blessing in a hundred years' time.'* For another priest, when affected individuals or communities speak, whether in anger or other emotions, *'they are part of God's message to us that we have to be open to receiving'*.

For some, this points to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. A religious woman commented: *'Thank God for the Holy Spirit that we were woken up'*. A priest and a deacon both interpreted the crisis and its mishandling as a refusal of the action of the Spirit, a refusal to trust in how the Spirit guides the Church into newness. That refusal is expressed in fear of letting go of power and lack of trust in the baptised and in habits of trying to control information and events. A bishop reflectively asked: *'Where is this part of God's plan or God's mission in the church? What is God teaching us?'* Another experienced priest made a similar comment: *'this is where, you know, the Gospel can really make demands on us to do a bit of deeper thinking as to what we feel is being asked for here.'*

All these reactions matter. It is important to understand the impact of abuse and how mishandling and poor response to victims have happened, and why people are passive or turn their faces away from the child abuse crisis. These behaviours and reactions arise from and within the culture of our relationships and self-understanding, which is structured by Catholic teaching as well as by our personal histories and our experience of the society in which we live. It is even more important to see this exploration in the faith-led framework offered by the comments above in which people are seeking to discern the meaning of the crisis. There is positive and constructive potential if we begin from an openness to how the Holy Spirit is at work in this experience and if we search for what might be redemptive and healing. This framework holds out hope. An older priest had this confidence:

> *I don't think it's a lost cause, and, and I think it could be part of the continual adult growth of the Church that we could actually look at these topics today and secure from some people quite a healthy response.*

In this chapter, we explore aspects of the culture and structures of Catholic life which emerged across all the voices who spoke to us and which shed light on the abuse crisis and its mishandling.

It is clear from some of the voices we heard and from reactions when we described this research in various settings that many people would prefer not to think about, or even know about, the child abuse crisis.

2. Silences, silencing and not believing

The theme of silences and being silenced, and the secrecy fostered by silence, emerged repeatedly.

- Survivors described being silenced by their abusers, usually priests or teachers whom they regarded as powerful adults. One survivor recalled: ***'you're told to think nothing of it because he's controlling your mind, he's controlling everything'***. Some were silenced because they had no language to describe what had happened to them. Most could not tell their parents what had happened; some only disclosed to family members many decades later, and even then, some were not believed. Others kept their abuse secret from their parents in order not to disturb their parents' faith. Some feared they would not be believed because of the status of priests or their relationship with the family. Some were unable to speak about what had happened, not even in counselling.
- The ideal of the Catholic family sometimes led to other silences in the past. A family might be outwardly devout but the inner reality was different for some children who described violence or neglect. In the past, some families knew that abuse has happened and asked the relevant institution to act, but quietly so as to avoid publicity or scandal. Abuse was kept secret within and by some families. One survivor described his Catholic family life as ***'quite a secretive buttoned-up environment'***, which meant that he 'fitted in' to a culture of secrecy surrounding abuse in a junior seminary.
- For laypeople in parishes where a priest has been removed because of allegations or convicted of an offence, there is a silence if they are not given accurate information about what has happened or invited into spaces where they can ask questions and search for understanding.
- When there is a case in a parish or school elsewhere in the diocese or a media report about the Catholic Church and child abuse in this country, if there is a silence from priests and deacons, people are left to interpret for themselves. They may feel it says that this issue does not matter or does not concern you. Some see this as deliberate secrecy which causes anger and mistrust. This silence may also allow misinformation to spread.
- Sometimes people decide to silence themselves: one man described hiding his set of books by Jean Vanier after the revelations that Vanier had been involved in abusive relationships with women in the l'Arche community.
- For priests who have been accused but where the police and the Crown Prosecution Service have decided there will be no prosecution, there often remains a grey area. They may return to ministry after psychological assessment but do not feel exonerated. There remains a silence around their experience. Other priests in their dioceses or communities are silent or silenced because they don't

For one woman, 'I think this is probably the most important thing to happen to the Church, do you know, I think the church would never have fundamentally changed that, the way that it has had to, without this event.'

know what has happened or what is true. Laypeople in the parishes they have served may know that there has been an allegation but they don't know the full story and may feel disturbed or angry.

- There are other habitual silences and secrets in the Church which are implicated. Priestly celibacy is rarely explained or discussed, nor is homosexuality among priests. Few priests or pastoral leaders are able to be open about their sexual orientation if they are gay. Catholic teaching on sexuality is experienced as a set of rules which do not encourage openness about the complexity and reality of the sexual aspects of people's lives.

- There are silences in leadership. Some of these are practical; when office-holders do not respond to survivors who make contact, or response is slow, it feels to victims as though their voice and experience do not matter, that you are silenced. When a priest or bishop is suddenly removed or unexpectedly resigns or disappears, if there is a silence about what has happened and why, rumours grow, and people are more likely to turn to social or mainstream media for information.

- Other silences are more directly concerned with an absence of the leadership needed to model and initiate a deeply pastoral and receptive response to survivors and in the growth in understanding of the wider Catholic community. There is a silence of omission when people do not feel free to challenge those in leadership or to tell them the truth or to give honest feedback on their behaviour or decisions.

- There are silences in seminaries. We heard that students for the priesthood may arrive with openness and varied life experiences, but then find that the constant scrutiny of their behaviour, relationships and motivations compels either silence or secrecy, particularly if they are struggling.

Each of these silences has its own complexity. Some are habitual for good reasons or reflect necessary practices. We rightly expect the careful scrutiny of students for the priesthood, for example, not least because the child abuse crisis has directed attention towards ensuring that those ordained to priestly ministry have sufficient human and psycho-sexual maturity. Bishops and other leaders are constrained in what they can say in public by ethical considerations of confidentiality and sometimes also by legal processes. Sometimes those in leadership in parishes or at diocesan level may simply not know what they can say or how they should say it, pointing to the need to think more deeply about what constitutes good practice in communication with affected parishes and dioceses.

Other silences are troubling. When laypeople in affected parishes would rather avoid the subject and do not wish to talk about it even when the Catholic Church or one of its institutions is prominent in the local or national news, this invites reflection. Is this self-silencing another expression of the secrecy and passivity that has been part of Catholic culture in the past and is still deep in the habits and attitudes of many Catholics? Perhaps it reflects a culture of powerlessness and indicates that despite Vatican II's theology of shared responsibility, the baptised

still feel disempowered and disinclined to ask questions. It could also suggest they have simply not seen any models of how to raise awkward or sensitive questions or ever been encouraged in a parish context to do so. It is also clear from the research that many feel that there has been an absence of leadership from the bishops in England and Wales, a silence they would like to see broken. This may not be the perception of bishops themselves, but it was widely reflected in the voices we heard.

Breaking the habits of silence and secrecy

Many silences could be broken or avoided, creating a different culture of relationships. Most of the silences revealed in the child abuse crisis are not healthy and do not give us life. They fail victims and survivors and fail Catholic communities affected by the crisis. Silence is not just absence; it communicates, giving messages which are often absorbed without noticing, particularly in a context such as the Catholic Church, where habits of silence and secrecy are deeply embedded. Silence about abuse goes further; it can leave people feeling affected in unexpected ways. One laywoman who felt that information about an offending priest had been withheld spoke about the importance of avoiding secrecy: ***'It's much more healthy because then you're not left feeling, you feel, it's a strange word to use but you almost feel dirty... you feel part of a system that's dirty.'***

The question here is whether and how habits of silence and secrecy in the culture of Catholic life have contributed to the abuse crisis and its mishandling. In a culture where some things cannot be talked about, or where large numbers of people do not feel they have a voice, it is not surprising that many people self-silence when faced with a reality such as the child abuse crisis. Catholic women in particular inherit a cultural legacy of the habit of silence, a legacy that many now challenge and resist but which is still powerful. One of the risks of silence is that it gives a message that people are not allowed or expected to know something. It is worth recalling here a voice already quoted earlier, someone from a parish whose former priest had been imprisoned for abuse offences:

> ***It would have been good to have somebody to come and explain to the parishes that had been sort of damaged, you know, what had gone on. But it was what you'd come to expect, that you're not really told anything, and you'll find out when and if you need to.***

The flourishing of the whole community is impeded if people are not allowed to know about such important matters. If you know about what is happening, as far as it possible to know, and feel you can speak, ask questions and be heard, you can take responsibility. Sometimes it may be the case that a leader can only explain in a very limited way what has happened. What matters is the sense that people have been given as much information as is possible, and that there is a relationship of real trust between people and priests or other leaders. People will understand real constraints when they are accurately explained. But unexplained silence and secrecy diminish trust. They also foster clericalism. As one priest observed: ***'the real sin of clericalism is the idea that you couldn't possibly know as much as I do about something because I'm a priest.'***

The wound of not being allowed to know

Bernard G. Prusak, an American ethicist, has written about the abuse scandal as revealing 'wrongs done to people as knowers' within how the Catholic Church works.[61] Borrowing from the work of a philosopher, Miranda Fricker, he points out that knowledge is power;

> knowing things enables us to make something of ourselves and to make a mark in the world. To those same ends, self-knowledge is also invaluable. But what about when we don't know what to make of a situation, or how to describe what has just happened to us? What about when we don't know whom to tell, or whether we will be believed? Imagine being told that no one will believe you. Or imagine being told that you don't know what you're talking about. Or that what you think you know can't be true.

Following Fricker, he observes that when we are 'degraded' as knowers, we are degraded as human persons, so central to our humanity is our capacity to know. He applies this idea particularly to victims of abuse but it can also be applied to communities. When laypeople are not told about matters that affect them, or not treated as people who are competent to know, this is both an injustice and a wound.

Silence also inhibits the pastoral response to victims and survivors and others affected by the abuse crisis within the Church. The Catholic community is usually strikingly compassionate when people are suffering. Catholic charities such as CAFOD and the SVP, and many local projects working with homeless people, foodbanks and refugees testify to immense generosity and willingness to enter into other people's need. Bereavement ministry is increasing, showing that people are willing to be sensitive companions to those who are grieving. The silent suffering of victims and survivors of abuse rarely needs financial support; but it does need acknowledgement, compassion and courage. If we can kiss the crucifix with the broken body of Christ on Good Friday, and venerate martyrs, both old and new, we should not turn our faces from encounters with the grievous reality of abuse.

Why has it been so difficult to believe victims and survivors?

In Chapter Two, we heard some of the voices of victims and survivors who had tried to disclose their experience of abuse by a priest or in a Catholic institutions and were met with denial and disbelief. Although this may now largely have changed as a result of better training and awareness, the impact on those who came forward earlier remains painful and the habit of disbelief still needs to be challenged. Why has it been so difficult to believe victims and to accept that priests and other Catholic office-holders have abused children or others in their care? A female survivor who has been very active in the Church had a clear view: ***'I think just on an institutional level, I think there has been a cultural denial.'***

The denial and disbelief are not just encountered when victims seek to disclose their abuse to individual office-holders. They are also found in how parish communities react when cases come to light. A female survivor described attitudes she had heard expressed by laypeople about a particular case: ***'they thought people were just making it up because they wanted money because it was about compensation.'*** Sometimes this disbelief is not so much about whether the victim is telling the truth but about how people see the alleged abuser. In one of the parish situations described in this research, people simply refused to accept that a priest whose ministry they had experienced was guilty of abuse, reflecting how as Catholics we are deeply schooled to trust priests. The priest accused of abuse may also deny that he is guilty, even when a criminal prosecution is brought and he is convicted. In a parish where this was the case, a layperson commented ***'You know, can a Catholic priest get a just trial in this country? I don't know, I really don't know.'*** In the same parish, someone who worked in a school added:

> ***I've always been taught to believe people who disclose, disclosure should always be believed. And I struggled with that and thinking... it just made it different because, you know, I suppose my sympathy was with Father.***

Silence as a positive practice

There are positive experiences of silence in Christian faith and Catholic practice. Monastic and contemplative communities live in ways that chose silence in large parts of daily life in order to be receptive to God's self-communication. Many laypeople as well as those who are ordained find that practices of silence found within traditions such as Ignatian or Carmelite spirituality are deeply nourishing. Such silences are different because they are chosen and work to enable communication rather than to prevent it or maintain secrecy. There are also times when silence is chosen for the sake of the Gospel; the silence of martyrs who will not deny their faith is a profound one.

When encounters with people who have experienced traumatic harm are possible, silence can play a profound role. We can choose not to have a voice, not to defend or justify or try to explain, in order that their voice can be restored and heard. Being present and listening in silence is sometimes a way we can give away power and offer to be witnesses to another person's pain. Brendan Geary, a Marist brother who attended Scottish child abuse enquiry hearings relating to abuse in his own religious congregation, has written about listening to the survivors of that abuse. He reflected that such silent presence

> may be precisely what is called for if we wish to respond to the sufferings and tragedies of others, and to be with them in their sorrow and their grieving. The act of witnessing requires that we let go of our own need for a role, or our need to "to do something".[62]

The wounds of not being believed still exist for many survivors. The work of changing Catholic culture so that within the Catholic community and its office-holders, victims find those who will believe them as well as those who will listen, acknowledge and act professionally in response, is still in progress.

As a safeguarding professional remarked, it is ***'always easier not to believe'***. Other clergy find it particularly difficult to believe that a priest whom they have known has abused: ***'you just couldn't believe that he'd behave like this.... we'd talked at school, we'd been in the SVP together and all this, and nothing had come to light'.*** A priest reflected on a particularly shocking case of rape by a priest of a victim who had come to him for confession:

> ***Of course, I was attacked by some of the clergy for saying that I believed her. I now do believe her, even more so. I think that, I mean, I couldn't be absolutely certain but I think I believed her because she's stuck to that story ever since and, as I told you, it's detailed and anybody could read about it on the internet, if they dug deep enough.***
>
> ***When I first said I believed her, it was for her sake, I was saying that for her sake and that proves right because at ten o'clock in the day, she appeared at my door to thank me and say how much it had meant to her, so that was an important moment. But at the same time, other priests would not have believed her because she had a chequered history.***

This difficulty in believing when someone discloses abuse has also happened in Catholic families. Several survivors talked about how their parents or other family members refused to believe a victim's experience because they found it so difficult to accept that a priest had done this. In the case of the survivor quoted at the beginning of this section, a family member would not believe a survivor until she checked his story with her own parish priest who confirmed that the priest involved was known to have abused children.

A tendency towards not believing allegations of abuse is not confined to Catholic settings. It happens across many other institutional settings in which abuse has happened. A report commissioned by IICSA examined a wide range of evidence about the ideas and attitudes which are embedded in wider social culture about child abuse. The report identified 'dominant discourses (that) appeared to take for granted as "truths" certain ideas relating to child sexual abuse'.[63] These included habits of deflection, denial and disbelief. In the IICSA report summing up the experience of around 6000 victims and survivors who spoke to the Truth Project, not being believed was a common experience.[64] But this does not make it more acceptable that Catholic office-holders and communities have been so slow to believe victims who disclose abuse and believe that priests have abused. It is little comfort to know that we have behaved just like any other institution, inclined to defend those in positions of trust and resistant to the voices of those who confront us with accounts of failure and harm.

There is now greater awareness of what should happen when someone discloses abuse in a setting related to the Catholic Church. The guidance from the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency states that anyone who has a formal role or ministry as a volunteer or staff member should 'listen and acknowledge what is said without passing judgement or minimising the information', when someone makes an allegation or discloses abuse.[65] Alongside this guidance, many within the Church have become aware of the importance of believing those who disclose because they recognise the pain and need of victims and the culpability

of the Church. There is a significant difference between 'listening and acknowledging' and 'believing', and which of these is practised may depend on where you stand. For safeguarding staff, for example, who have to deal with both victims and alleged offenders, 'listening and acknowledging' defines a professional stance. But it may not meet the needs of victims. The wounds of not being believed still exist for many survivors. The work of changing Catholic culture so that within the Catholic community and its office-holders, victims find those who will believe them as well as those who will listen, acknowledge and act professionally in response, is still in progress.

3. Clericalism: a whole Church concern

It is not surprising that many of the voices heard in this research pointed to or described habits and practices associated with clericalism when trying to understand how abuse and mishandling have happened. The cultural habits just described, of silences and secrecy, and of difficulties in believing that priests have abused children, also point to elements of clericalism. It is clear in wider literature about the abuse crisis that many of these habits and attitudes are implicated both in how the abuse happened and in how the Church's response has lacked compassion and justice. This research provides extensive evidence of how clericalism is still pervasive in our parishes and dioceses in England and Wales and how it is implicated in the abuse crisis and subsequent mishandling.

There was little doubt among research participants about the connections between clericalism and abuse. They spoke of how clericalism has helped create a context which has been conducive to abuse and to mishandling of the response. The priest was and perhaps still is seen as a powerful and trusted figure, which meant that children were left alone with them, and victims were unable to resist and then unable to disclose what had happened because they thought they would not be believed or because abusers told them to be silent. Victims also assumed that their families would not believe abuse by a priest had happened because they knew how the priest was regarded by their parents. Some adults would, in the past, have regarded it as sinful even to accuse a priest of abuse.

Clericalism is also associated with mishandling and particularly with the failure to believe when people make allegations of abuse. The systemic nature of clericalism was and sometimes is still visible in how victims were disregarded or mistrusted because the priority was to protect the reputation of the particular priest who was accused and of the priesthood as a whole. In the past, it led to the habit of moving a priest alleged or known to be an abuser or sending him for treatment or to a different kind of work. Clericalism is still implicated in how people feel unable to challenge behaviour or ask questions of priests, although there is now a better understanding of safeguarding principles and boundaries that help everyone, including priests. It also affects what happens when a parish community has to come to terms with knowing that a priest who served in their parish has abused. As explored earlier in Chapter Three,

a community that has developed mature collaborative relationships will be better able to respond with compassion than a parish where relationships still reflect clericalist assumptions and habits.

'Above and apart'; How clericalism operates

> ***'We've put people on this pedestal and we've left them there.'***

Much of how clericalism operates lies in attitudes and perceptions. Many research participants spoke about how priests are seen as superior, 'god-like', on pedestals, untouchable, people who can do no wrong. A priest is seen as an 'alter Christus', an icon of Christ, and therefore assumed to be holy by default. Even the young adults who spoke to us recognised this problem. One young woman thought that we are influenced by 'conceptions of sanctity' in our perceptions of priests; ***'they're above us, as opposed to being human too'***. It is not only in laypeople's perceptions of priests that the pedestal still exists. A sense of superiority is sometimes evident in the attitude of some priests. The same young woman recalled an episode she had witnessed:

> ***I remember a time, at my church, where, I think it was an old lady, was trying to walk down some steps to get to the church and there were two seminarians who'd come, because I think it was Mass at Chrism or something, so they'd all come back from a seminary and I distinctly remember one of the seminarians saying, Oh, would you like some help and, and two of them helped her, one on either side of her, because she took their arms and one of the seminarians said, Oh isn't***

Defining clericalism

Beyond *'Bad Apples': Understanding Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem and Cultivating Strategies for Change.*

A research project carried out at Fordham University in the USA produced a report based on an in-depth survey of 300 people in which they discuss the links between clericalism and abuse. They analyse how clericalism is expressed and maintained in cultural attitudes and habits related to sex, gender and power and how these interact. They describe clericalism as 'an invisible backdrop' of our life together in the Catholic Church. Their definition of clericalism is useful:

> A structure of power that isolates clergy and sets priests above and apart, granting them excessive authority, trust, rights, and responsibilities while diminishing the agency of lay people and religious.[66]

One of the priests who took part in this research gave another insightful explanation:

> Clericalism, as I understand it, is, is a kind of expression of power and status where people, where priests afford to themselves a distinctiveness that is above the kind of expectations that we should have of anybody and that what they, what they do is right because they do it, and if it gets to that stage, then, you know, you've lost all moral compass altogether.

Pope Francis has spoken frequently about clericalism, including in his opening address to the Synod of Bishops' meeting in October 2018:

> It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to decisively overcome the scourge of clericalism… Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen. Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church: we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated.[67]

Other authors have also offered definitions of clericalism:

Nicholas Senz: 'Clericalism is a disordered attitude toward clergy, an excessive deference, and an assumption of their moral superiority.'[68]

Thomas Plante: 'the tendency to allow a small group of highly regarded and special leaders to have the power and privilege to make all or most of the important and critical decisions for the organization and those within it.'[69]

Gerard Arbuckle: 'the idealization of the priesthood, and by extension, the idealization of the Catholic Church… linked to a sense of entitlement, superiority and exclusion, and abuse of power.'[70]

Marie Keenan: 'The word clericalism is used to describe the situation where priests live in a hermetical world, set apart from and set above the non-ordained members of the Catholic Church. The word is often used to describe the attitude that the clerical state is of divine origin and that it represents a higher calling than that of the lay state. It is a word often associated with a presumption of superiority.'[71]

it so lovely for you to be walked down the steps by seminarians and I thought, are you kidding me?

When priests are seen as superior, it generates a culture of deference which means people do not feel able to question or challenge them. Undoubtedly this is changing; laypeople are more willing to express disagreement or question arrangements, particularly as parish re-organisation has meant significant changes which affect everyone. But deferential attitudes and habits are still ingrained and lead to a desire to protect priests by minimising or denying the experience of abuse, or even refusing to believe it has happened.

It also means that many laypeople feel powerless or unable to act or to lead unless or until a priest invites them to do so. A culture of clericalism works against the possibilities of mature collaboration and shared responsibility. A laywoman who had been involved in Catholic education described how modes of behaviours that are commonplace in other professional settings such as admitting mistakes, apologising and giving feedback and mutual challenge, don't happen in the Church: *'We don't see any of those things in parishes and yet they are a natural part of behaviour.'*

A culture of clericalism works against the possibilities of mature collaboration and shared responsibility.

Clericalism and recently ordained priests

Clericalism is visible in any behaviour that assumes or makes priests or indeed seminarians exceptional or entitled to special treatment. One of the disturbing aspects of the research was that a large proportion of voices expressed particular concern about the attitudes and behaviour of more recently ordained priests (sometimes described as 'young priests'). *'They make themselves more aloof'*, one woman commented. For another, *'They seem so much more separated somehow and so much more above and theoretical and academic and they're career minded, all that kind of thing.'* Even a bishop thought that newer priests *'have more outward signs of clericalism'*. Several found the attachment to cassocks and older styles of vestments in some newer priests a barrier; for others, the difficultly lay in their *'intransigence'* and *'certainty'*, their need to be in control, which they related to immaturity. An experienced priest worried about *'whether they are in any sense at home in their own skins.'* He made an explicit link to abuse: '*Even if they don't personally abuse anybody … the kind of parish structures that they will put in place won't help people grow and ultimately people won't be safe.'*

This area of reflection raised questions about what happens in seminary formation in particular. We heard informed accounts of how seminaries now work to ensure that extensive support is given for 'human formation', the process of growing into various dimensions of maturity. Yet even though formation programmes may be tackling the right issues in an appropriate and professional way, the embedded culture of seminaries may work as a second 'informal curriculum' giving different messages which are sometimes more powerful than the formal curriculum. People puzzle over what they experience in this group of priests once they are working in parishes. For some, there was a recognition that those being formed for priesthood grew up in a social and cultural context in which people's trust in almost all institutions has

fractured, very little is accepted as 'true', and identities are politicised. There are also generational differences within the Catholic experience. Some recently ordained priests may be expressing a cultural and personal need in how they behave which differs from the concerns and needs of older generations of Catholics. They may also see clerical dress as an important form of witness. But for some parish members, the surrounding culture of clericalism is again implicated; certain styles of dress, for example, communicate messages about clerical power and ideas about priesthood which they find unhelpful.

There is a challenge here to find ways to build mutual understanding of all the perspectives involved and to explore how different generations see things. It helps for communities to be able to question and understand how recently ordained priests see their identity and task and even their liturgical preferences; and for communities to explain their responses and reasoning too. But such conversations need to be genuine and open-hearted dialogues in which all are invited to notice and re-consider attitudes and behaviour.

Clericalism as a problem of the whole Church: how laypeople collude

Many also acknowledged that laypeople collude with clericalism. We inherit a fear of sounding disrespectful, a sense that we should not question or complain or challenge. We join in habits which support clericalism such as asking permission even for small actions, assuming that the priest must control everything, and a tendency to *'look after'* priests, implying that they can't look after themselves. One active and experienced woman said:

> *I can only speak for myself, but I can see that I should be different, sometimes it's easy to slip in the, to the role of baking a cake for the priest or, you know, looking after and I've got, I, as a person, I think I tend to be someone who cares for others. And I need, I need to reflect on how I am with a, with the priests in that way.*

There is a contradiction here. The priest is seen as powerful and holy, but also as somewhat fragile, in need of protection from ordinary adult responsibilities. Within this contradiction, it may be difficult for a priest simply to be human and mature as an adult and also prone to make mistakes like anyone else. Yet several voices affirmed strongly that this is what people in parish communities would like; to see and experience all priests in their real humanity as flawed and vulnerable. There were several testimonies in the data of how relationships between priests and people become mutually supportive and deeply human when priests are able to let their vulnerability be seen or sensed. One priest who had been involved in safeguarding work described what happened after he had handled some difficult media work related to a local case and then returned to his own parish:

> *I was stood at the back of church, as people were going out … and some people were just, they'd just touch your arm as they were going past and they couldn't look at you, you know, they just wanted to express something of their care really.*

There were several testimonies in the data of how relationships between priests and people become mutually supportive and deeply human when priests are able to let their vulnerability be seen or sensed.

In older generations and in Catholic culture of the past, clericalism led to habits of adulation, almost venerating the priest. Adulation, importantly, is both given and received. Such habits were and perhaps still are bolstered by a sense of the priest's separateness, his lengthy formation in a semi-monastic institution and his presbytery housing. To some, priests' lifestyle, and particularly their formation in seminaries, indicates a lack of contact with the ordinary realities of finding employment, the cost of living and the demands of family life. When our habits and attitudes treat priests as 'special', as exceptional, unlike the rest of the baptised who live ordinary lives, it is not surprising that this also leads to a sense of entitlement or privilege in some priests. A priest from a religious order commented: *'Whenever you visited a seminary, you know, saw clergy behaving in a particularly entitled kind of way, you just looked at them and thought, Oh gosh, that's not, that's really unhealthy.'*

Habits of deference and perceptions of priests as special and different are unhelpful and limiting for priests as well as laypeople. Some feel what one religious described as 'the weight of inadequacy' because they are expected to live up to the ideal. It is hard for priests to break the habits of clericalism alone. Clericalist attitudes and behaviours are intricately embedded in how diocesan and parish life is organised. Even when priests try to resist assumptions that they alone are in charge, or know everything, or should decide everything, they may encounter resistance. A retired priest described going to celebrate Mass as a supply priest and being asked how he wanted to arrange things, since the assumption was that Mass should be celebrated as the priest wishes, whatever the custom and practice of the parish he visits. He asked to celebrate according to local custom, to do whatever the parish normally does.

Dismantling the default of clericalism

Several of the priests who spoke to us described the ways they try personally to dismantle or avoid the habits and relationships associated with clericalism:

> *For example, I very rarely wear a collar, I've never ever had anybody ask me, well where's your collar? Why do you not wear a collar, Father? And it's like, you just accept that well, this is [name] like, you know, and it's, many people call me [name], rather than Father [name], but I take both obviously, which is great, and when people ever do complain at that, so well that's my name mum and dad chose for me, so that's okay for me as well.*

> *I don't automatically assume that they should call me Father, and the reason why I feel that is because that has to be earned, they have to get to know me as I am, and then they'll choose whether or not they're going to call me Father or not.*

Many priests would welcome the dialogue that could happen if we could all break the habits associated with clericalism; their relationships and growth are impoverished as well as those of the wider community of faith.

One other particular theme related to clericalism also emerged in the voices that spoke to us, illustrating how clericalism is still the default

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assumption in parish life. This is the longstanding problem of what happens when the priest in a parish moves and a new one arrives. A new priest may work in quite a different way, celebrate liturgy differently and dismantle long established practices. The message given and absorbed is that the priest has all the power and the parish belongs to him. One woman described a distressing episode:

> ***He came to our parish, arrived, there he was, his spirituality was utterly different from the priest that we had had before. His notion of anything collaborative was simply not there and there was one particular occasion where he'd said from the pulpit that whenever people came forward, they should genuflect. And like most parishes, elderly parish, lots of elderly people, and we had, at that point, two elderly religious sisters and he'd kind of said, as a throwaway, I think, at the end, if anybody's got any problems with it, come and see me afterwards. Lots of people had problems with it. These two religious sisters came to speak to him, and we could hear him shouting, 'I am your spiritual father; you will do as I say'.***

Clericalism is a problem of and for the whole Church, the entire Catholic community.

The habit of accepting this message, of assuming power is centralised in the priest, lies at the heart of how clericalism is sustained in parish life. Reactions vary; ***'some people think, oh well, you know, that's just how he is'***, one layperson said. A religious suggested another kind of response: ***'If we didn't like them, we just didn't talk to them or if we got fed up with them, we just avoided them.'*** Others want to take responsibility and raise concerns, but ***'there isn't a clear route'***. Some do try to give constructive and honest feedback in a diplomatic way but don't feel that this helps. In the voices that spoke about this, including several women who were theologically informed and very active in the Church, there was a weary resignation.

The loss when a new priest comes is particularly acute when a parish has been directly affected by an abuse case or experienced a difficult re-organisation. One laywoman described it:

> ***People coming in don't know that journey. They really don't know the pain, the positives, the work, they don't know that, so to go to making decisions without, and this is what we're going to do, that's disrespecting that and … the phrase I keep hearing from possibly ten or twelve people is, 'but we're here, they come and go'.***

There are many habits, structures and practices which still give the message that the parish belongs to the priest, that he is in charge and must decide everything. This is fertile ground for attitudes which diminish the baptismal responsibility of laypeople and limit the sense that the whole community is responsible for its own life and mission. This concern is of much wider relevance than the issues of abuse and mishandling explored in this research; but it matters specifically in relation to how we need to transform culture and relationships in the light of the abuse crisis.

Clericalism is a problem of and for the whole Church, the entire Catholic community. It is not only the responsibility of priests and bishops to solve. It needs changes of attitude and intentional changes in habits from both laypeople and priests. As one religious woman noted:, ***'We're absolutely programmed and it will take generations.'*** A priest added a further comment: ***'It's very important to, to understand that that system only survived because there was something in it for the laity as well'.***

Clericalism is embedded in Catholic culture and also in our structures and systems, which in turn reflect what we believe about the Church as a whole baptised body and its ministry. The attitudes and beliefs about priesthood in particular point to the need to re-examine the theology of priesthood to see whether some of the roots of clericalism are found there. Chapter Seven explores this further.

4. Bystander perspectives

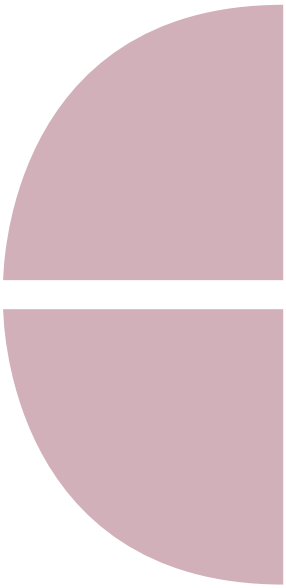
When a parish or religious community has been directly affected by a case of clerical child abuse or a related offence, often both people and priests within and beyond that community ask themselves searching questions. Did I see or suspect anything? Was there anything that made me uncomfortable? What should I have done? Sometimes people realise afterwards that they knew something was not right, but they didn't know clearly enough what that was. Or they may have no idea how to speak about their intuition or to whom, or whether it is proper to do so. For some it then becomes a matter of conscience; do I bear some of the responsibility because there might be something I should have done? These feelings persist, sometimes for many years, indicating how the impact of the abuse crisis endures.

This is not the only reaction likely to happen. As discussed earlier, some simply prefer to avoid the issue and would rather not know or speak about it. Others find themselves unable to believe that a priest whom they knew and whose ministry they saw is guilty of whatever abuse has been alleged, especially if the allegation relates to an earlier time period or a different place. The range of reactions can be diverse and sometimes divisive and painful for a parish or community. All these responses were found among our research participants.

Survivors ask related questions. They wonder whether people who were active in the place they were abused noticed anything or knew anything about the priest or other persons who abused them. They wonder why it was allowed to happen, and it matters very much to know whether Church authorities were aware and could or should have acted to prevent the abuse.

A perspective that can be useful here is the idea of being bystanders. There is a body of research which has examined how people respond when some grievous harm is being done in their midst. This research is concerned to understand why people do not act when they see wrong being done, reflecting on atrocities such as the Holocaust or genocide. There is a continuum of ways of describing a bystander:

- Someone who does not know that harm is happening but who is part of a wider culture that is implicated in allowing that harm.
- Someone who does not know for sure that harm is happening, but suspects something is wrong.
- Someone who refuses to believe or to see or interpret signs of inappropriate behaviour.



- Someone who knows something but does not know how to act or feel able to act.
- Someone who does raise questions or act in some way but is not believed.

For the theologian Elisabeth T. Vasko, a bystander is someone who behaves with what she terms 'unethical passivity' in the face of suffering or violence.[72] In other words, this means someone who is implicated by proximity or by knowing and could or should have acted.

The question raised here is whether some or all of us have been, or possibly still are, bystanders, either to specific cases of abuse in places we know or to the collective experience of knowing that clerical child abuse has happened in our dioceses, schools and parishes. If we collude with relationships and habits that maintain silences or promote clericalism, are we implicated in a culture that has failed to act rightly when harm is being done in cases of abuse and in poor institutional response to victims and survivors?

This is not an easy area for reflection. Some 'bystanders' may be parents or family members of victims or those who carry anxieties about their own children when a priest they know has offended. They are also secondary victims of the abuse. One survivor reflected on how his own parents might have felt when he disclosed that he had been abused because they let their son be taken away for a night by a priest who then raped him. Many years later, he is still not sure what they thought: ***'I still don't think that they fully took on board what had happened.'*** A grandparent in another parish from which a priest had been imprisoned worried about her grandsons, especially when her daughter, their mother, asked ***'how do we know nothing's happened to the boys?'*** Others were not so close to a case of abuse, but still felt caught up in it and may be affected in ways they do not even notice. It is hard to say whether those who are secondary victims are also bystanders, that is, people who perhaps could have acted differently. But it is worth asking whether our habitual attitudes towards priests might have worked against parents' and parishioners' instincts about their children's safety.

There is no objective 'view from nowhere' in relation to whether any of us are bystanders or not. A bishop who spoke in this research commented that most bishops and priests see themselves as innocent bystanders who feel resentment about offending priests. Others think that bishops and clergy are bystanders who could have acted to prevent some abuse earlier or to respond more actively to affected communities. This was an example of starkly different perspectives which make a complex picture.

Feeling complicit: unwitting and unwilling collusion

I think I feel complicit not at a personal level because actually I wasn't aware of it probably in all of those settings I've been in; it's only afterwards that I've become aware... It's only looking back on it, you can see, oh yeah, that behaviour was this. I think I feel complicit because I've been part of a system which has formed me and is sinful yes, systemic sin, it is; it's formed me in a way which is less than wholesome and certainly doesn't keep, lead to wholeness and growth

a bystander is someone who behaves with what she terms 'unethical passivity' in the face of suffering or violence.

and life to the full and isn't about using your gifts and talents and that transformation, communion, unity. So, I think I felt complicit in the sense that I'm part of a system, which is abusive.

None of us want to feel that we have been complicit in any way with the wound of child abuse. Many will understandably feel that they are innocent and have a clear conscience. Others will justify not acting by saying they didn't actually know anything, or that there were no procedures in place at the time when the abuse took place some time ago. But it is worth considering whether we all share a degree of collective complicity. It may be unwitting and often unwilling collusion with clericalism or the habit of silence or of preferring not to ask awkward questions; but can we say there is nothing we could have done? In Pope Francis' call for conversion of hearts in response to the child abuse crisis, there is a dynamic of repentance involved, a recognition that there are habits and patterns we need to change.

Some of those who spoke to us, including some priests in particular, did examine their consciences and ask themselves whether they now bear some responsibility for what happened or for not acting. A priest whose former colleague had been imprisoned for a sexual offence described serious reflection leading to a clear conscience:

Did I ever think this would happen, you know, do I ever think, yeah, was there something I missed? Yeah, I've gone through all of that. And I'm quite happy now that there wasn't anything I missed, and I never thought [the offending priest] was a danger to children. Or indeed, you know, a sexual predator in any shape or form.

But another priest described observing small actions in relation to dressing altar servers that concerned him, observing in retrospect that *'you feel slightly guilty in not doing anything at the time'.* One younger person wondered how *'good guys'* should respond when they discover things have been brushed under the carpet – what does a 'good' response to this look like?

One other dynamic is relevant here, further connecting questions about bystanders with clericalism. Some of those who spoke to us explained that what prevented them from acting was the sense that they had no power to do so or no language they could use. Some might also have been schooled in a sense that it was wrong to bring scandal to the Church. This may reflect structures and attitudes that expect obedience, in religious communities for example, or in priests' relationships with their bishops. For laypeople in a parish, the sense of powerlessness is pervasive.

The Church as a collective bystander

Considering whether and how we are bystanders also helps us to see that clerical child abuse is never just a matter of a victim and a perpetrator. It always happens in a context where there are other people and where there are structures and systems operating which influence attitudes, relationships and habits. It may be that the institution of the Church has been a collective bystander, with too many examples of unethical passivity in the face of the suffering and trauma of victims and survivors.

In Pope Francis' call for conversion of hearts in response to the child abuse crisis, there is a dynamic of repentance involved, a recognition that there are habits and patterns we need to change.

It is helpful that there are bishops willing to acknowledge this. In September 2022, for example, the US Catholic Bishops spoke about the 'enduring wounds' suffered by the laity as a result of clerical abuse. They acknowledge that 'many of these wounds have been inflicted not only by individual members of the Church but often by the institution itself.'[73] Passive bystanding may be a habit or behaviour we learn or somehow absorb unconsciously in the Catholic Church in the systems, structures and cultures that reward obedience to authority and loyalty to superiors. Whilst the official teaching of the Church proposes that all the baptised share responsibility for its life and mission, the practical reality at parish level communicates a different message when power and decision-making is firmly in clerical hands and there are few spaces in which laypeople can raise questions.

One further perspective on this issue was helpful. We have already quoted a leader of a male religious congregation who spoke strongly to affirm that ***'most people have done absolutely nothing wrong'*** and should not feel either guilty or paralysed. There is shame to be borne and acknowledged, he said, but ***'it's important that we don't let the toxicity of this thing leak into places where it doesn't belong'***. We should avoid expecting people to take on blame when they have no real guilt to bear. There is a delicate balance to be found between an appropriate examination of conscience, individually or communally, and a recognition of constraints and habits which we did not create but which are likely to have influenced us all.

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5. Accountability and support for priests

Each of the themes considered so far in this chapter leads to questions about accountability. Silences support the denial of accountability. Clericalism avoids or rejects what is proposed in accountability. And questions about complicity and whether we are bystanders point to the need to ask about accountability. The issue of accountability emerged as one of the strongest themes in this research. Fully a quarter of those we interviewed pointed to the lack of accountability in the culture and structures of the Church both for priests and for bishops.[74] Those speaking included priests, laypeople, and safeguarding staff as well as those who work in seminaries.

Comments on this theme often connected several ideas relating to processes that would support healthy relationships and ministry. Many of the voices we heard described how support and accountability are linked and enable each other. If good support is in place, accountability becomes possible. Conversely, if accountability is expected without the offer and availability of support, it is alienating.

Priests told us about the informal ways they found support, often from close friends and family members, or from parishioners. One priest said ***'I have never ever not felt really supported, as a priest, in a way where I feel quite amazed and humbled by it, so that's what's allowed me to face my own struggles with it and work through stuff.'*** Some find a mentor.

Practices of support and accountability

It matters to be clear what we mean by accountability for any particular group. Here we focus on accountability for those in ordained ministry, whilst recognising that accountability is also relevant for other members of the Church, personally and in roles and ministries.

There are several overlapping practices to consider, each of which combines elements of support and accountability.

- Spiritual direction, which involves regular meetings with a spiritual director who listens and accompanies someone who is seeking to deepen their relationship with God in whatever context they live and work. Several priests and bishops talked about their primary sense of accountability to God and the value of this kind of support. One priest explained that ***'my safeguard has been then to seek out and find, right through my life, a sound spiritual director to bounce everything off and, and without that, I'd have been completely up the swanny'***. It is usually left to priests themselves to decide whether or not to seek spiritual direction and to find the right person.
- Supervision understood in the pastoral or clinical sense, as a space in which someone involved in ministry, whether ordained or not, can reflect on aspects of their work with a skilled professional supervisor in order to understand better what is happening and how it affects their well-being. Some priests and bishops seek this kind of supervision and others do not. As one safeguarding professional noted, ***'there's no sanction if you don't.'*** A priest who does engage in supervision described his experience:

  > ***I found that a benefit, really beneficial but that's at my level, finding that, you know, to go and be able to say to someone, I'm struggling with this situation, I'm struggling to because... and they used to say 'and how does it make you feel?' and explore the feelings that go with it... I personally think it's invaluable.***

- Two bishops also described how this kind of accompaniment was helpful and important, even if only taken up for a period or in relation to particular challenges.
- Supervision understood as a line management practice, in which there is a focus on what is being achieved in a person's work, including difficulties and challenges, and what skills the person might need to develop or strengthen. The absence of line management was a major concern expressed in our data and is discussed further below. Both laypeople and priests spoke about the absence of line management for priests and bishops.
- Appraisal understood as regular, usually annual, review of experience and achievement with an appropriate reviewer. This was not explicitly mentioned in our data although it is implicit in line management. The idea that appraisal might be valuable for those in ordained ministry has been discussed periodically among priests. In the 1990s, the National Conference of Priests asked the Bishops' Conference to develop an appraisal model which led to a report titled *Supporting Ministry*. The report set out three models of appraisal or review that could be adopted by dioceses. There is no published data about whether the models of appraisal have been used or whether any diocese recommends or enables a practice of appraisal for priests.

Others join a mutual support group, which may be linked to a spirituality or another programme. A member of a group of this kind explained the value:

> ***We can't sit and debate what priests in general need, unless we're prepared to be honest about what our own needs and vulnerabilities are and that's what set the tone.. it is a space where we can be honest with one another.***

Accountability and priests

The data indicates two areas of accountability which were seen as closely implicated in how abuse and its mishandling happened and how growth to maturity in the Catholic community is still impeded.

The first area is concerned with supervision understood as line management. This concerns what a priest does in his active ministry. It is the least discussed and developed area of how ordained ministry operates in parishes and the aspect of accountability that came up most often in our interviews. A parish safeguarding representative, for example, identified an absence of ***'performance management'***, where ***'people are watched and have supervision chats with their line manager'***, as happens in other professions. Many laypeople find it hard to understand, that a priest can be left so alone.

Priests themselves were particularly direct: ***'I think we're the least monitored, least controlled, least supervised group of people in the whole world'***, one said. For a current parish priest, ***'I'm not held to account here at all. No one holds me to account. .. If I was being dysfunctional, no one tells me.'*** This leads to a lack of direction and oversight: ***'no-one investing time in seeing how you're doing'***; and also a lack of challenge: ***'We can get away with a lot of less than acceptable standards of behaviour',*** another priest said, posing a question: ***'So what does it mean for priests to be professional and to have some sort of professional code of conduct?'***

This is also seen as failure of care. As one priest notes, some degree of challenge is ***'for the greater well-being of the priest himself'***. The lack of mechanisms such as appraisal limits awareness of what kind of development in ministry or skills an individual might need. Some voices, both lay and ordained, point out that appraisal is commonplace elsewhere. Many laypeople work in organisations where accountability is expressed in management and appraisal structures and notice their absence in diocesan life.

The absence of practical structures of accountability creates risk not only to standards of ministry, but also to the priest's own sense of identity and capacity to flourish safely. A young priest spoke of the risk that priests become 'lone rangers', isolated and 'self-referential', so that destructive patterns of behaviour become more alluring and may take hold. A deacon felt that this absence deepens vulnerabilities, and priests may not then be able to find the right support and supervision to understand their experience and needs. The data also clearly reports that many priests feel a lack of support and of 'nurturing'. An experienced priest observed: ***'I think we've always known, from the day I was ordained, if you need help, don't go asking, because you won't get it, you won't find it, you've got to sort your own help out.'***

Accountability upwards

Both priests and laypeople puzzled over the idea that a diocesan priest is accountable to his bishop. In theory this is where accountability lies, but no-one who spoke to us thought that it worked well in practice. A priest with experience in industry commented that this relationship does not enable either challenge or care, and that difficult issues are often not followed up. He pointed out that a bishop has to understand his priests as people, get to know their lives and what's happening for them, as it might explain challenging behaviour, and then they can be helped. But, he felt, no effort is made to do this, and the priests are not open with the bishop or with each other. A priest in another diocese said that when challenged, his own bishop takes great offence and relies on his authority and power rather than building relationships with and earning the respect of his priests.

Bishops themselves seem only too aware of how they may be perceived by their priests. One shared what he had noticed in his relationship with his priests: that they answer the phone differently if they know it's him and their tone changes suddenly; that priests don't tell their bishops things; he knows they are guarded around him and don't tell the truth. The priests in his diocese are not keen to pray with him and are only willing to say formulaic, set prayers when they pray together; they do not want to be open or to pray from the heart in front of him, which he interprets as a lack of trust. He felt that priests view their bishop rather like an Ofsted inspector in that the best view of him is the taillights of the car going down the road. They feel only relief when he has gone.

The relationship between priests and bishops has multiple dimensions. There is a formal expectation of obedience, but as one priest commented, ***'it doesn't play a huge part in our lives'***, other than when priests are asked to move to a different parish or ministry. The bishop is expected to oversee the spiritual well-being of priests, but in practice, priests decide for themselves whether to find a spiritual director or to find someone to provide supportive supervision in relation to their ministry, or indeed to undertake some counselling or therapy. It is not surprising that priests feel they are alone in navigating their own growth and the challenges they encounter in ministry.

This is also a wider perspective here. A religious priest observed that ***'so much of the authority of the Church is unaccountable and that's hugely problematic... when you're dealing with authority which can itself be quite abusive'***. This is an illuminating comment. If priests do not see that accountability is a practice and culture at all levels of the Church, it will be more difficult to build a healthy practice of accountability at local parish level. There may be anger or frustration that they do not experience any downwards accountability from bishops, or when they see that bishops do not seem to be accountable upwards in any practical or structured way.

Accountability of priests to each other

The lack of clear practices in relation to upwards accountability also means that a culture of mutual accountability between priests is unlikely or difficult to develop. Priests themselves sometimes see dysfunctional behaviour in other priests; but as one priest notes, there are no systems

If priests do not see that accountability is a practice and culture at all levels of the Church, it will be more difficult to build a healthy practice of accountability at local parish level.

to enable this to be raised:

> ***Where do you take that? … it's not my responsibility, I don't line manage them, I'm not pastorally or ecclesiologically responsible for them but we all know it goes on still, dysfunctional behaviour and no one telling.***

It is not only individual priests whose behaviour may become dysfunctional. The diocesan structures currently in place may also fail to support or enable accountability. Two other priests commented on the deanery structure; one described deanery meetings as ***'a farce'***, with ***'no genuine meeting of people'*** and undercurrents of division and ***'a felt lack of respect from some'*** for racial or ethnic difference. Another priest who had just been appointed as a dean explained a current expectation that deanery meetings should work as a support group where ***'we're all opening up to one another'***, yet ***'I've been a priest for 30 years and very little of that's occurred'***. But there is potential here. A skilled lay professional who described deans as ***'disempowered'*** by the sexual abuse crisis commented ***'I think our deans have got to become managerial, they've got to become empowered. We need to excite them, we need to communicate well with them and we need to empower them'***.

Accountability to the community of faith

The second area where accountability lacks practical expression concerns the priest's relationship with the communities he serves. This could be described as accountability outwards, a kind of accountability that can be expressed in ordinary habits and behaviour as well as practical structures or processes. Several laypeople described what they found lacking. When they have concerns about behaviour or want to ask a priest to explain or justify a decision,

> ***there isn't a clear route…there's not a process or a system where parishioners can bring, you know, a concern, put that it way, a concern, a complaint in a way that they know it will be systematically and fairly formally addressed.***

The issue of what happens when a new priest comes to a parish was raised again here. A deacon commented that ***'one priest is in a parish for ten years, and moves on and the next guy comes in, can just, at a whim, stop everything, change everything, do something completely different and, and you think, is that right?'***

This is not a new concern. *Supporting Ministry*, the report mentioned earlier, which was published in 1999 by the Bishops' Conference, was a result of a request from priests themselves to address this. The report gave a description of what accountability means:

> a priests' or deacon's duty to be responsible to God and others for using his gifts and talents in his ministry, office and other tasks entrusted to him.[75]

The 'others' are primarily the bishop, to whom he is 'directly responsible'.

The report then adds:

> In the wider sense, accountability includes giving explanations to those for whom his ministry and/or office make him responsible. Modern examples include a reasonable expectation that a new parish priest will respect the present arrangements in the parish and also its legitimate differences from his previous experience.

More recently in 2020 the Bishops' Conference issued *Caring Safely for Others*: *Pastoral Standards and Safe Conduct in Ministry (CSFO)*. The introduction includes a strong statement on accountability:

> Similarly, although bishops, priests and deacons do not hold public office, they do hold ecclesiastical offices and exercise pastoral ministries which are public in nature. Holders of public office are 'accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office' (Nolan). In the same way, clergy must be prepared to be held accountable for their conduct and aspire to observe the highest standards of behaviour in the exercise of their ministry.[76]

These texts point us towards a larger understanding of accountability as concerned with relationships and habits as well as structures. Practices such as supervision meetings and annual reviews will work more effectively if they are part of a wider culture which creates and supports everyday habits that signal accountability. The standards set out in *Caring Safely for Others* to ensure good safeguarding practice are explicit about what this means in practice. In a standard concerned with the need for partnership between clergy and lay safeguarding staff and volunteers in relation to safeguarding ministry, for example, we read:

> This requires that we:
>
> Stand ready to be held to account, and hold to account those with whom we collaborate, for the way we exercise our safeguarding ministry. This requires that we:
>
> a. Be willing to accept questions or criticism regarding the good practice of our safeguarding ministry.
> b. Be willing to question or challenge our lay collaborators regarding their good practice in the work of safeguarding children and adults at risk.

If these habits of accountability matter in regard to safeguarding, surely they also need to be practiced in parish life and ministry more generally? It will not be effective to try to create a different culture only around safeguarding awareness and practice. The attitudes, habits and behaviours that express and invite accountability need to be found across all aspects of parish life. As *Caring Safely for Others* indicates, the aspiration is also for a culture in which accountability is mutual, between those who are ordained and other members of the baptised.

So how might this happen? How does a priest, or a parish team member or lay leader, begin to move parish cultures in this direction? There are many small behaviours and signals that can contribute. There is also a need for stronger leadership and possibly for experimentation. This is explored further in Chapter Eight.

Signs of hope and progress

There are signs of hope and progress. Two seminary staff members described their awareness of the need for accountability and for *'building in also structures of support and accountability and mentoring and which, as yet, aren't built in in a systemic sort of way.'* A priest who worked in a seminary reflected:

> *To be our best, for people, as priests, we have to know that we are accountable to people and that's accountable in the most positive, wholesome, whatever those sorts of words we want to throw into it, accountable in that best and most wholesome way to people and I think that's what really is the most important thing that, in formation, we try to get across is, we are accountable.*

The same priest suggested that current diocesan re-organisation strategies made necessary because there are fewer priests would lead to *'completely new and embedded support and accountability'*. A parish priest described actions taken in relation to a case of an imprisoned priest that reflected a clear sense of accountability to the parish community and the pastoral team, not just other clergy. Putting accountability structures in place protects priests. One priest commented on how the most recent reforms to safeguarding practice have rigorous accountability built in, which enables priests to feel safer and more confident about what they should be doing. Another priest connected the need for accountability structures even more directly to child abuse and safeguarding, seeing it as a fundamental part of the cultural change that is needed alongside policies and procedures.

A further sign of progress is the development of wider access for priests to skilled professionals who can offer what is termed 'pastoral accompaniment'. One professional working in this field described this concept as 'the way forward', a model which avoids perceptions of power bearing down on individuals from hierarchical office-holders. Rather, it frames the process in a collegial way in relation to ministry. Pastoral accompaniment assists anyone in ministry to be accountable first of all to themselves.

The need for practical expressions of accountability for priests is evident in the testimony of priests themselves as well as in the aspirations and needs of the communities they serve. There is growing recognition of its importance, yet progress towards putting in place practical mechanisms remains slow and piecemeal. It is worth reflecting on what prevents or inhibits us from moving in this direction. It may partly be the case that accountability seems an alien concept to the life of the Church, something taken up from secular disciplines and management theory. If so, then part of the answer may be in finding the theological rationale and framework for the relationships we desire and aspire to in the Church, a task taken up in the next chapter.

The JP2 Directory

The JP2 Directory contains details of the members of the JP2 Network, 'a community of counselling professionals who are interested in growing together, both personally and professionally, with a focus on the Catholic faith, its spirituality and understanding the needs of its clergy.' The network, which was founded in 2015, promotes 'pastoral accompaniment, sometimes called pastoral supervision, as well as providing counselling services'. Each part of the network is co-ordinated locally by participating dioceses and brought together in a central directory in which details of network members are listed. See **The JP2 Directory https://jp2directory.org/about/**

6. Hierarchy, accountability and leadership

Questions about accountability were also raised in relation to bishops, both by bishops themselves and by laypeople and priests. It is clear from this research and from wider literature that the abuse crisis has sharpened a focus on how authority and power work in the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. The extensive accounts of mishandling and failure in response to victims and survivors in many different countries point towards issues of leadership and accountability at the episcopal level as well as in the parish.[77]

In Chapter Three, we described the complexity and difficulties bishops experience in this area, some of which point directly to issues of structure and theology. In this section, we look briefly at the perceptions of bishops and of other members of the Church in relation to accountability and leadership and the culture and systems in which these are embedded.

The perspective of bishops

The bishops who spoke to us described multiple accountabilities: to the Pope; to the Holy See including through the ad limina visit; and to the people and clergy of their dioceses.[78] One bishop added his legal accountability to charity law as a diocesan trustee. But two of the bishops also recognised that whilst they may feel accountable, it is difficult to know what this means in practice. For one bishop, *'there aren't many mechanisms for actually being answerable… we don't have any mechanisms or processes for the exercise, to display that accountability'.* Although the ad limina system is a formal process, they did not see this as an effective mechanism.[79] For one of the bishops, it is *'so stylized and carefully constructed that I don't think it is real accountability'*. In contrast, he added, his *'real accountability'* is *'not a system or a structure, it's my choice, is to my spiritual director'* and to a professional colleague who provides skilled accompaniment.

Another bishop pointed out that whether or not systems of accountability are in place, people in his diocese do give him feedback: *'they're very quick to write in and tell me what they think'*. He spoke of the need to ensure that curial staff work with local parish communities when decisions are being made: *'we're their servants, not the other way round'*. But he saw the need for change:

> *What's got to change, I think … there's got to be some sense of, I wouldn't say external accountability, I don't know what I mean exactly, I don't have a model for that but it cannot be that the bishop gets to decide, chapter and verse, on everything in the diocese, in the sense, in that way, without any sense of being accountable to somebody else.*

A third bishop gave another perspective, explaining that what matters to him is to have trustees and other advisers who will challenge him and describing his willingness to listen. There were other voices

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affirming that challenge and other aspects of mutual accountability do operate between bishops and their key advisers and between bishops themselves. 'They do use each other as a mutual support network but they're also not afraid to challenge each other either', a professional diocesan office-holder confirmed. But if this is the case for some or indeed most bishops, it is not visible to people or priests outside those inner circles and in the perception of those outside the episcopal institutional structures, bishops are the sole decision-makers.

How are bishops accountable?

A range of voices puzzled over this question. A lay safeguarding representative asked,*'Who manages the bishop then? .... if you're a social worker or if you're a health worker, there's the chain, isn't there? So somebody is performance managing everybody.'* A priest's perception was that *'each bishop is king of his own castle, so each bishop has absolute control, in his diocese.'* This was echoed by a female religious with leadership experience who pointed out *'there is no accountability to anybody else, except upwards.'*[80] For others, usually laypeople or priests who desire a more equal and unclerical Church, concern focused on how bishops exercise the power given to them in canon law. They described experiences of decisions being taken that affected them without any sense that consultation and listening had happened. Two voices, from a woman and a religious priest, gave the example of the decision about a different Scripture translation to be used in Mass, a translation which they understood does not have inclusive language. A deacon identified an *'authoritarian streak'*, experienced when bishops make decisions affecting the community of faith without consultation. This may be with the best of intentions, he observed, *'but you just think, what's that all about?'*

In these and other comments, practical dimensions of what is missing and needed can be glimpsed. Transparency and good communication are absent or inadequate; there may be good reasons for particular decisions, but these are not explained. More significantly, there are no regular structured mechanisms through which those affected by decisions can raise concerns and enter dialogue either before or after decisions are made. The only channel left is individual letters or emails to bishops, which is not often a useful way to handle much of what matters to people, either for bishops or for those who are troubled. There is rarely any feedback, either at diocesan or national level, to enable the wider community of faith to feel that their views and concerns matter and have been taken seriously.

Several well-informed voices noted that the absence of accountability mechanisms had become particularly obvious in relation to safeguarding. Crucially, bishops were not accountable to their own safeguarding structures; *'we had no power to force them',* a diocesan safeguarding adviser observed. The Elliott Review recognised this, commenting on the weakness of a relationship that was merely advisory:

More significantly, there are no regular structured mechanisms through which those affected by decisions can raise concerns and enter dialogue either before or after decisions are made.

> However, the advice and guidance that was offered was not always followed, and no power or authority had been given to CSAS to insist that it was. This represented an obvious deficit in the existing structure that had previously been highlighted in the evidence presented, whilst the Church was subject to public scrutiny at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.[81]

In the new safeguarding structures led by the CSSA, this should be different. The Elliott Review argued that the CSSA as a national agency should provide an independent audit and review function for dioceses and 'would have to be empowered to undertake its role as a regulator. These powers would be given to it through a contractual relationship being established between it and those bodies that it provides a service to.'[82] But the multiple sometimes conflicting roles and responsibilities that bishops hold in relation to safeguarding, victims and survivors, priests, offenders and others described in Chapter Two still remain and make it complicated to work out how to further strengthen accountability.

Culture and impunity

If accountability is absent, or invisible or ineffective, the perception grows that there is impunity for bishops, that they retain control of everything and are not obliged to explain anything. This may not be how bishops themselves see or experience their ministry, and it may in part reflect deep habits from earlier experience of Catholic culture rather than present realities, but it is still a problem. It is not simply the challenge of working out what 'downwards' accountability of bishops, both to their priests and to their diocesan community, might look like in practice. It is a matter of culture, of attitudes and habits which bolster the sense of the bishop as remote and powerful and which create a sense of impunity. It is also a matter of structure, an area where canon law plays a powerful role assigning immense power to bishops.[83]

The experience of the child abuse crisis has brought this into fresh focus and also challenged and begun to dismantle it. We have witnessed IICSA, a statutory inquiry, calling Catholic bishops to account and making detailed public criticism of their leadership. There is also awareness that elsewhere in the Catholic Church, bishops have been asked to resign as a result of abuse or mishandling. In a particularly significant move, Pope Francis issued the motu proprio already mentioned, *Vos estis lux mundi,* a document extending canon law, which establishes how bishops and religious superiors are to be held accountable in relation to allegations of abuse and clarifies their obligation to report any abuse to relevant authorities.[84] Commenting on this and on a further change to canon law lifting the 'pontifical secret', the moral theologian James Keenan notes that 'the canonical structures that assured the impunity of our episcopacy are slowly but surely being removed'.[85] More recently, the rapid and public way in which two investigations were pursued into the circumstances surrounding the resignation of the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle have demonstrated a new willingness to act when questions are raised about a bishop, at least when those questions concern safeguarding.

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Culture and leadership

The related question asked by many voices in this research is squarely about leadership. There was a strong sense from laypeople, religious and priests that the Catholic community in England and Wales has not had the leadership that they see as needed in the Church's response to child abuse. Many voices described what they longed for: ***'leadership that can transform'; that is 'visionary, compassionate, strong and strategic'***; ***'more proactive and interested and curious about diving into the complexity'***; ***'adventurous and imaginative'***; and willing to say that change is needed. It also needs to be leadership that can admit failure. An older priest 'despaired' when, in his view, Cardinal Nichols was unable to be 'contrite and forthright' when the IICSA report came out. Some observe that the leadership they desire may involve some struggle with ***'the system'***, with the pressures of the institutional role. In the words of one woman, we need bishops ***'who won't be stamped out, who won't be smothered, who won't be killed by the system'***.

The last comment pinpoints what many see as the problem: the culture and institutional system that surrounds and structures episcopal leadership. A priest with wide experience summed this up well:

> ***I think part of the problem is that those chosen for leadership, so to be bishops, it seems to me that the base of criteria is that you will support the system, so once you're in that, your job is to support, is the institution, ultimately, it's not primarily about the Gospel, that, it's about the institution.***

Other voices expressed similar concerns: that the way bishops are chosen means ***'you're not going to get anything radical from them'.*** The priest quoted above noted that the confidential consultation form on candidates for the episcopacy used by the Papal Nuncio asks whether the candidate gives uncritical assent to the magisterium of the church. ***'They will be obedient because they're chosen because of the way they think'***. For a theologian, this means most bishops ***'have built up a sort of institutional identity and a sort of sense of who they're meant to be for the church and for the people.'*** The concern expressed is that energy goes into conforming rather than pastoral leadership.

Some of those interviewed had experience of how the Bishops' Conference worked and how its culture discouraged the kind of leadership they would like to see. '***Everything's got to be decided across the board, so even any individual bishop who wants to go out on a limb slightly, you know, might find that quite difficult'***, one priest said. Another retired priest expressed concern that when bishops cannot come to ***'a united voice'***, they don't say anything at all. A safeguarding professional thought that what is needed is ***'an atmosphere where bishops can take their place at the table, speak their truth, without fear'***.

There are tensions in the perceptions here, tensions which bishops probably also experience. On one hand, they are seen as holding all the power, and some voices, including some survivors, cannot understand why they do not act more decisively when mishandling has happened or to enforce new policies. The perception is that the hierarchical structure

The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Following the unexpected resignation of the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, Robert Byrne, the Archbishop of Liverpool, Malcolm McMahon OP, was asked by the Vatican Dicastery for Bishops to conduct a canonical Investigation into the circumstances and the concerns raised within the diocese and in wider media. A summary of the report is found here **Canonical Investigation Report - Executive Summary - Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle (diocesehn.org.uk)** although the full text has not been released. A further review carried out by the CSSA examined safeguarding practice in the diocese and has been published in full here **CSSA Safeguarding Review into the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)**

of the Church should ensure certain things happen. For example, some safeguarding staff ask why the chairman of the Bishops' Conference, currently Cardinal Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, cannot enforce action in other dioceses.[86] On the other hand, as noted above, some laypeople and priests desire a more participative and unclerical Church and lament the lack of effective consultation and genuine shared decision-making. They hope for a less authoritarian style of leadership.

In Catholic life in England and Wales, we do not often talk in mature, careful and serious ways about how we experience the leadership of our bishops, what we need and how we might grow into better habits and structures together. There have been almost no visible spaces in which such conversations could be initiated and structured to be generative and mutually supportive. The current exploration of synodality in our communal life which is discussed further in Chapter Eight may open some possible pathways. But the difficulties here are surely systemic; it is not just a case of creating a new structure of some kind. Cultural habits are also implicated, including those already discussed in this chapter. This is part of the 'practical and effective action' involved in the process of conversion that the crisis asks of us, and perhaps part of what the Spirit is teaching us.

In Catholic life in England and Wales, we do not often talk in mature, careful and serious ways about how we experience the leadership of our bishops, what we need and how we might grow into better habits and structures together.

Apologies and accountability

Many of the tensions surrounding how episcopal ministry is exercised and how it is perceived by others within the Catholic community and externally come into particular focus in relation to apologising to victims and survivors of abuse and to others affected by mishandling. Apologies occupy a sensitive space, holding various meanings. For some survivors, they matter as recognition of their experience, a further expression that they are believed. For others, they contribute towards a sense of justice or restoration by acknowledgement of a wrong done in which the institution as well as the perpetrator needs to take responsibility. For some, they are part of a path of encounter and possible healing.

What we learned from the data is that an apology is not just a matter of hearing the right words spoken. Some survivors described apologies that they found inauthentic. One female survivor described what she saw as an authentic response: someone who can ***'kind of put hands on heart and say, actually we got that terribly wrong and we have some responsibility for reparation or whatever that looks like'.*** Others described genuine encounters in which they felt believed and where they could feel the sorrow and humility of the person apologising.

Even when the apology comes from a leader who is not directly responsible as the abuse and/or mishandling may have happened in his diocese or congregation years before his time, it still makes an impact if it is human and pastoral. One survivor spoke of being ***'very grateful'*** for the apologies he had received. Another spoke of how he now saw the diocesan bishop with whom he had met as ***'the top of the Church'***, indicating a new hierarchy of pastoral sensitivity. The bishop whom he described gave a crucial re-framing of the notion of apology in his reflections on encounters with survivors:

Only I could say to them, I have no right to expect this from you, but you have every right to hear from me that I ask your forgiveness. You have a right to be asked for that forgiveness, we have no right to expect it, but that has to be done with, by the Church and within the Church.

This comment offers a theological opening which is discussed in the next chapter. It also indicates another angle on the role and accountability of bishops and leaders of religious congregations. Victims and survivors, and probably also the wider community, need to hear from those in leadership roles, bishops and other office-holders, that they are accepting responsibility, not personally but on behalf of the body or institution of the Church.

It is not easy for bishops and other leaders to act as freely in this area as many would wish. One leader described it as *'very hard terrain for people to enter into correctly'*. Another acknowledged that *'it's about really feeling it and owning it and being transformed by it'.* As well as the pastoral and human qualities involved, bishops may receive advice from insurers about apologies that conflict with their pastoral instincts. One bishop described how he decided to act:

When I decided to make that apology, I didn't go and consult my diocesan insurers , I didn't, you know, it was my apology, not a carefully calculated worded or crafted to avoid any subsequent legal action, so the insurance didn't even know I'd done it. It was news to them. Some people may say that's foolhardy but for me, it's, it's the response that you make to, you know, a, a compassionate response.

There are also sometimes legal or procedural constraints, if an inquiry is underway or a legal process is taking place. Another bishop spoke of how these constraints were

contrary .... to all that I would have wished to do and be as a pastor, because my natural instinct in that setting would be to, just to reach out to them and to speak. But I knew I couldn't do [that], out of respect for them and the process.

Several bishops acknowledged that bishops have been fearful and cautious in the light of insurance advice and their responsibilities as trustees. A leader of a male religious congregation pointed out that once a legal process is happening, it is not possible to engage in contact and that can easily be interpreted by the person on the other side of the case as a refusal to engage.

Apologies do not only matter for victims and survivors. Others have also suffered undue hurt and pain from mishandling or from allegations which were later found to be without substance. One laywoman spoke of how she had felt deceived when she discovered that a former colleague, a priest, was not, as she had been given to think, absent through illness but rather on a treatment programme for sex offenders following allegations made against him. Two priests who had been accused and suspended but later returned to ministry both remained deeply hurt by what they had experienced.

7. Confession, forgiveness and justice

For Catholics, the sacraments are immensely important. They are central to our experience of faith and to our understanding of what it means to belong to the Catholic community. The teaching and disciplines of the Church in relation to sacraments have a profound impact on our lives, sometimes bringing pain and exclusion as well as drawing us deeply and joyfully into discipleship and community. Sacraments become surrounded or embedded in the culture of our families, parishes and communities, in our local habits and practices. This culture often still needs to be renewed or transformed despite the decades of changing practices since Vatican II, but this is a slow and variable process and older attitudes and habits often prevail or may be called back to attention.

In relation to the child abuse crisis, this research has found many ways in which cultural attitudes and practices connected to the sacrament of reconciliation have been unhelpful and sometimes have deepened the damage and pain. For some victims the sacrament itself, still familiarly known as 'confession', has been a site of further abuse. For others, survivors or those affected by a case in their parish or community, the experience raises questions about forgiveness, grace and reconciliation.

Some survivors described a distorted view of the sacrament that prevailed when they were children and explained how this deepened the harm of abuse. For one survivor, *'God was out to get me, and it was about going to confession. But if you didn't do your confession right, you wouldn't be forgiven. I saw myself as a bad person, so then I just went to Mass every day to try and make myself good.'* When a child has this understanding, and is then abused by a priest, she feels even more at risk, often somehow at fault. God is seen as punitive and vengeful and there is little that communicates grace nor explains their innocence. The background Catholic culture in relation to this sacrament deepens the impact of abuse, adding a dimension of harm to the child's spirit and soul.

Another survivor described an experience of the sacrament in which she tried to disclose abuse as an adult:

> *I made the mistake of [going] to confession and I told a priest and he put his hand over my head and said a prayer and he said, right, you're healed now, off you go. And I felt so angry and I didn't exactly feel abused again, it wasn't that, but I just felt not listened to and kind of demeaned and pushed aside.*

The sacrament of reconciliation is a privileged and utterly confidential space, but if used in this way, to close down a victim's voice and communicate such a limited idea of how grace works, it is a misuse of the sacrament and a denial of its meaning.

Other voices expressed concerns about how forgiveness is understood in relation to priests who abuse. A seminary teacher commented: *'There was a time when people thought he just goes … and confesses his temptations and possibly even what he's done and, with God's help,*

this research has found many ways in which cultural attitudes and practices connected to the sacrament of reconciliation have been unhelpful and sometimes have deepened the damage and pain.

and a little time out of parish, he will be fine.' The teacher thought that *'we now know that's not the case'*, but others were not so confident. A survivor observed: *'the theology has said to him, once you ask for forgiveness, it's all sorted, so there's no social accountability, there's no in the real-world accountabilities.'* Forgiveness seems too easily given, without any sense of what was traditionally known as restitution and with little account taken of the traumatic impact of abuse. For another survivor, *'basically anybody that says mea culpa is almost, you know, given ten hail Marys and off you go, even if what you've actually done is something that should put you in jail for twenty years.'* When abuse is treated only as sin that can be forgiven, and not as a criminal act to be reported and handled through the justice system, victims become invisible and the full meaning and demands of forgiveness are obscured.

The questions about forgiveness raised by abuse concern us all. In our data, bishops, laypeople, priests and religious all spoke about their heart-searching on these issues. Should we forgive abusers? How do we make a moral evaluation when a priest who has abused has also ministered to individuals and communities in good and helpful ways? Catholics have a very strong sense of God's mercy as boundless; it is one of the experiences we desire to offer to people who are searching for faith or meaning. Yet it can make forgiveness seem superficial or empty if the way in which we speak about it is incommensurate to the harm done. In relation to survivors, the Catholic ethos of being forgiving can also add to a sense of oppression, that they are expected to forgive when they still feel unacknowledged or unhealed. A female survivor described being told by a priest that *'my problem is that I need to learn to forgive, and [he] sends me off with the wrong prayers to say and I don't trust in God enough'.*

The sacrament of reconciliation is misused when grace and forgiveness are treated as transactional and seem to close down truthfulness and healing.

The sacrament of reconciliation is misused when grace and forgiveness are treated as transactional and seem to close down truthfulness and healing. The conversion of hearts to which the abuse crisis calls the entire Catholic community is impeded when we do not have opportunities to explore how attitudes and habits related to confession, grace and forgiveness might be re-examined and expanded.

Justice and restoration

There is another perspective often omitted when we reflect on mercy, grace and forgiveness, one which connects to the themes of accountability and apologies discussed earlier. For many survivors, there is a profound sense of injustice done, both in the original abuse, and for some, in how Catholic institutions have mistreated them when they made allegations and asked for acknowledgement and redress. A male survivor who had been abused as an altar server by his parish priest reflected: *'I just thought, something's been, a wrong has been committed, there must be a process of where right is done and even, five, six years later, with the Church, I thought the same, like a fool.'*

The sense of injustice done is a driving force for some survivors. They want a wrong to be made right, not just for themselves, but for others. Hence the sense of mission that some feel, already described in Chapter Four. '*We've put a spirited campaign together to try and get justice*

for ourselves and for others that have been abused within the Catholic Church', a survivors' activism group explained, and *'more importantly to, you know, try and influence things into the future'.* The words of a survivor activist are worth repeating: *'I think it's a mission really, it's something that I would want to engage in for the rest of my life'.*

A sense of injustice associated with abuse does not only appear in the testimonies of survivors. Several women, lay and religious, described anger and outrage and a sense of being deceived or failed when cases of abuse were mishandled, when the truth is not shared about what has happened, and when *'people haven't resigned, when they should have done maybe or stepped aside.'* An accused and exonerated priest described the anger of parishioners at his treatment: *'some are no longer going to church, because they have found injustice in the church, some they just went to other parishes, instead of going in that church, where you have people who distribute communion and yet they do such things.'* And a priest who had held a leadership role in a religious congregation described an experience he found *'shaming'*, when his order made what he saw as a *'meagre'* pay-out to a victim, less than 10 per cent of the legal costs paid out: *'we wanted that justice be done, but boy did we fail'.*

These instincts are also born from and within Catholic culture and sacramental life. They point to a sense of connection between healing and justice, between forgiveness and restitution or some way of restoring what was taken. They reveal a sense of needing to be forgiven for failures, of office-holders feeling compelled to act to re-balance the moral relationship even when they are not personally responsible. They also illustrate again a tension between the standards and ideals of justice and generous compassion to which we might hold ourselves in the light of the Gospel and the way in which legal and fiduciary responsibilities exert other pressures. There are three realities in play which can be dissonant; the legal processes shaped by secular ideas of rights, criminality and redress; the more intuitive and sometimes elusive idea of *'natural justice'*; and the demands of the Gospel and an ethic of accompaniment and healing.

The Catholic Church has a deep attachment to the meaning of mercy and forgiveness and a powerful understanding of justice. Both concepts are crucially important in understanding what has happened to us in the abuse crisis, and what we need to learn from it, what the crisis is teaching us.

I just thought, something's been, a wrong has been committed, there must be a process of where right is done and even, five, six years later, with the Church, I thought the same, like a fool.

These instincts are also born from and within Catholic culture and sacramental life. They point to a sense of connection between healing and justice, between forgiveness and restitution or some way of restoring what was taken.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored some of the habits, attitudes and systemic ways of thinking and relating to each other in the Church which emerged as significant across the experience of all our research participants. They each shed some light on how we might respond to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter and on what we need to learn, as a community of faith, in the light of the abuse crisis and the ways we have failed victims and survivors. They are also areas in which a process of discernment is needed, so that we might understand better where the Spirit is leading the Church. An analysis such as this, presented from empirical research, provides rich material for discernment, offering access to a depth of listening to a wide range of voices. But it is not the discernment process itself, however carefully and reflexively we have carried out our task as researchers.

Each of the themes discussed here prompts further questions,

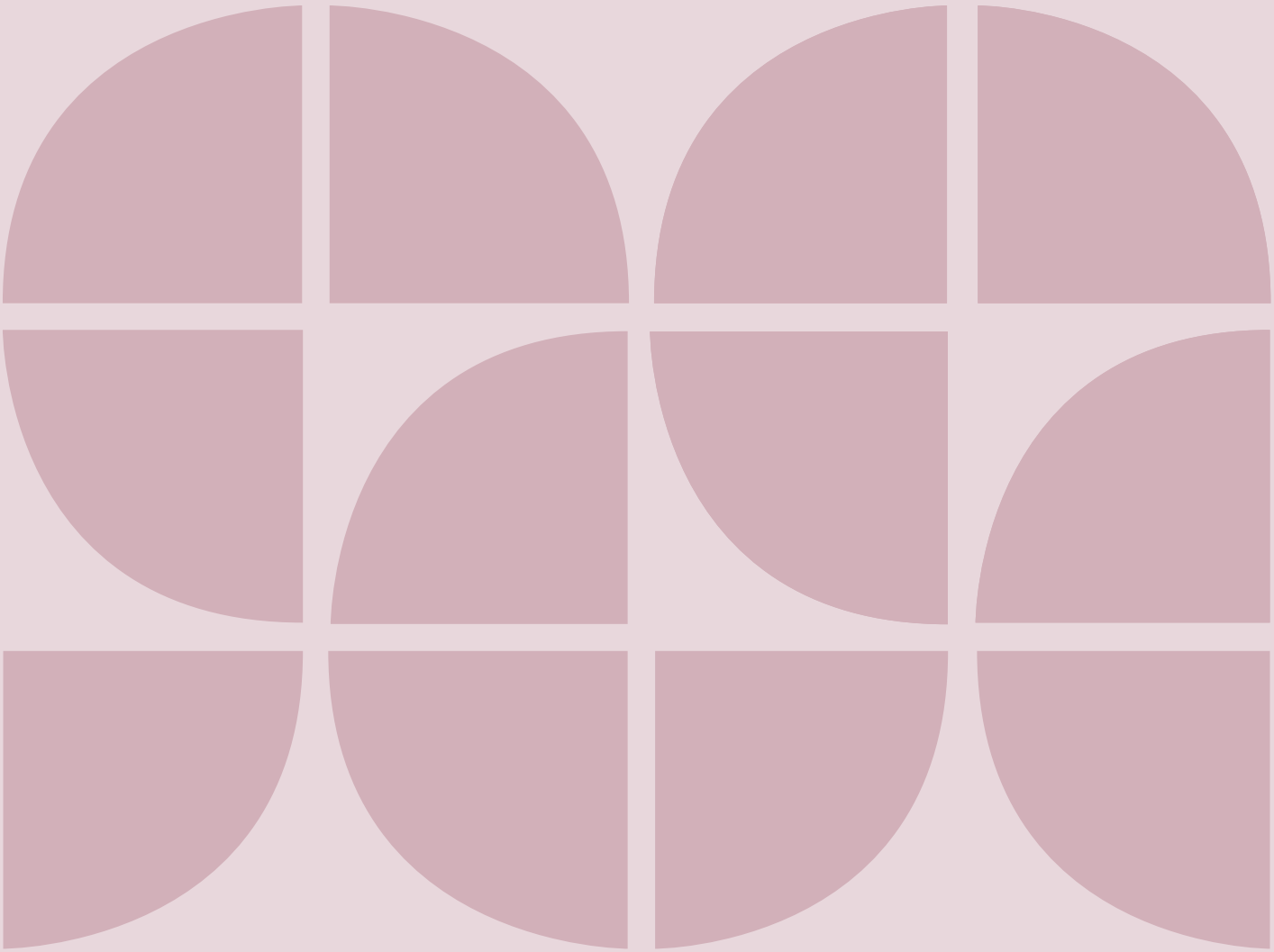
- ***Can we unlearn habits of silencing and secrecy? Can we mutually challenge and change our collusion with clericalism?***
- ***Can we examine our consciences on whether we have been bystanders, individually and collectively, unethically passive in the face of this crisis?***
- ***Can we find mechanisms of practical accountability for priests and bishops, and places to describe and invite a different kind of leadership from bishops?***
- ***Can we understand better the demands of justice and the complexity of grace and forgiveness in relation to victims, survivors and others affected by this crisis?***

This report aims to invite and nourish the possibilities of such discernment and to indicate the questions that need to be asked. It does not have answers, although it does offer evidence and perspectives which may be useful.

There is also a question which runs across all these themes. Each in some way connects to aspects of our theological understanding. Each reveals a theology, sometimes a skewed or dysfunctional one. We have to ask whether the habits and ways of thinking discussed here come from our theology or whether in some way they reflect distortions or departures from our deepest theological understanding. There is a complex relationship between our theology, expressed in Catholic teaching, and the way we actually live and worship and interpret what our faith asks of us in our lives and our social worlds. But that does not mean we should avoid exploring it. If our theological understanding lies beneath some of the ways that our culture and habits have taken unhealthy or unhelpful directions, then our theology too needs to be explored. This task is begun in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

The possibilities of redemption



1. Introduction

We cannot hide from the fact that the Church herself must face the lack of faith and the corruption even within herself. In particular, we cannot forget the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people "due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons." [4] We are continually challenged "as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit." [5]

For too long the cry of the victims has been a cry that the Church has not been able to hear sufficiently. These are deep wounds that are difficult to heal, for which forgiveness can never be asked for enough and which constitute obstacles, sometimes imposing ones, to advancing in the direction of "journeying together."

The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted. It is impossible to think of "a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People:" [6] together let us ask the Lord for "the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them." [7]

In spite of our infidelities, the Spirit continues to act in history and to show his lifegiving power. It is precisely in the furrows dug by the sufferings of every kind endured by the human family and by the People of God that new languages of faith and new paths are flourishing: capable not only of interpreting events from a theological point of view but also of finding in trials the reasons for refounding the path of Christian and ecclesial life.[87]

Synod Preparatory Document

In this chapter, we explore the theological themes and questions which arise from listening to the experience of all those who spoke in this research. Our life together in the Catholic Church is shaped by our theology which is expressed in Catholic teaching and liturgy. This teaching evolves and develops as the Church unfolds its life and mission in the history and contexts we experience. As Catholics we believe that the Holy Spirit is active in this process, revealing how the gifts and truths of our tradition always call us forward. It is a particular responsibility of bishops to teach what the Church believes, ensuring that what we have received is passed on faithfully. Theologians also play an important role, exploring fresh questions and discovering the insights of Catholic tradition that refresh the Church's life and mission.

Alongside bishops and theologians, the Church teaches that all the baptised take part in this process. Individually and communally we have a 'sense of the faith', an instinct for what is true. In the words of Vatican Two, speaking about Catholic faith, the entire people of God 'penetrates it more deeply with right judgement and applies it more fully in daily life'.[90] This crucial aspect of Catholic teaching is now coming into fresh awareness and practical reality as we explore and take forward Pope Francis' invitation to become a Church which lives and practices synodality.

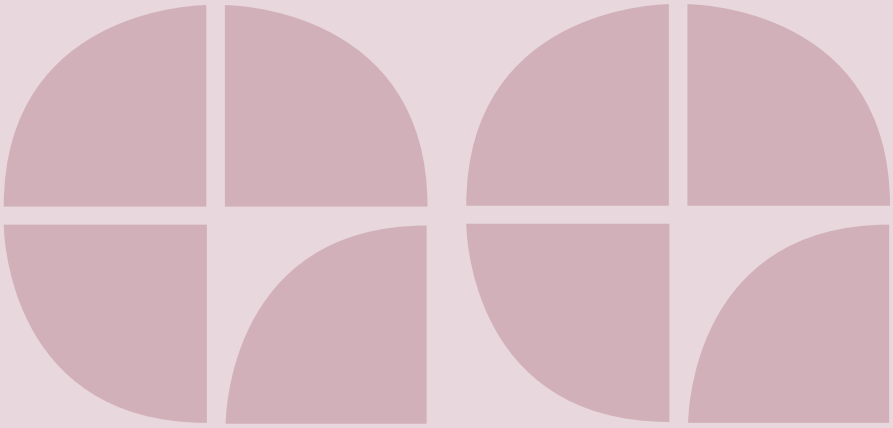
Understanding what we mean by Tradition

Tradition, according to the Fathers of the Church, is in fact just the opposite of a burden of the past. It is a vital energy, a propulsive as much as a protective force, acting within an entire community at the heart of each of the faithful.

Henri De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, p.91[88]

According to a dynamic understanding of tradition, says Ratzinger: "Not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition; in other words, not every tradition that arises in the Church is a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ. There is a distorting, as well as a legitimate, tradition... Consequently, tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensable criticism of tradition, and tradition must therefore always be related back to it and measured by it."[3] Pope Francis alluded to these two different ways of understanding tradition, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the 'deposit of faith' as something static. The word of God cannot be moth-balled like some old blanket in an attempt to keep insects at bay! No. The word of God is a dynamic and living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfilment that none can halt".[4]

Fr Ormond Rush, Theological Reflection at the Sixteenth General Congregation of the Synod, 16 October 2023.[89]



Synodality

Synodality in the current Catholic understanding means 'journeying together' as a whole community of faith. It is a way in which the whole Church listens together to the Holy Spirit, 'remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way'.[91] Synodal listening involves the skill and gift of discernment, in which we learn to be attentive and open to how the Spirit guides our path. Synodality is expressed in processes and events but it is more than structures or meetings. It is 'the particular style' that expresses what it means to be the Church. We are 'summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel'. So 'synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working'.[92]

Pope Francis asked the global Catholic Church to begin a new synodal journey when he announced that the 2023 Synod of Bishops would focus on this theme. A process of listening, learning and dialogue took place in local churches (dioceses) from 2021 onwards, gradually bringing the concerns, desires and hopes of diverse voices into a series of syntheses at local, national and continental level leading to Synodal Assemblies in Rome in 2023 and 2024. In addition to the bishops who are members of the Synod, elected by their bishops' conferences, lay people, priests and religious are taking part.

Alongside the Pope's invitation, in some dioceses and some entire countries, bishops have led local churches into synodal processes for their own renewal and in response to their own challenges. In England and Wales, the Archdiocese of Liverpool followed a synodal path over three years leading to a diocesan Synod Assembly in 2021 and a new diocesan pastoral plan. See Synodality - Together on the road **https://www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/about/synodality.**

The Church in Ireland has begun its own process, and the Church in Germany has also been exploring a synodal path.

See Home - Irish Synodal Pathway **https://synod.ie/**

There are close connections between synodal processes and the themes of this research. The pain and grief caused by the abuse crisis features in most of the diocesan reports synthesising what has been expressed in local synodal listening. The passage at the beginning of this chapter taken from the initial document from the Synod Office in the Vatican confirms how the questions raised by the abuse crisis are significant in the whole Church's synodal journey. Chapter Eight includes exploration of how synodal ways of thinking and listening offer positive ways to respond to the abuse crisis and create healing and hopeful spaces.

When we reflect on how the abuse crisis happened and how it has affected victims and survivors and also the whole Church, it is important to ask:

- How can we listen to all the voices through which the Spirit works, including those on the edges of the Church or outside it, and those who have experienced the immense harm of abuse?
- How can Catholic teaching and theology help us interpret what they mean and what they ask of the Church?
- What parts of Catholic teaching and theology are implicated in the culture, habits and structures associated with the abuse crisis and our failures in response? How do they need to be questioned or re-examined?
- What is the Holy Spirit revealing to us now, as a Church, about our life and mission?

These questions prompt the theological perspectives explored in this chapter. Most of the voices that spoke to us are voices of faith. Even the survivors who had moved away from the Catholic Church because of abuse acknowledged how they were formed by Catholic faith. Their ethical clarity, honesty and generosity were striking. Many of the active Church members, lay and ordained, spoke with a profound ***'sense of the faith'***, evident in a deep instinct of care and concern for what the Church is and what it could and should be like, a gift of lifetimes of faithful belonging and mission. All these voices invite discernment of how the Spirit nudges and calls us to greater truth and fidelity.

Untying the knots in how we receive and live Catholic teaching

One of the images we have used in theological reflection in this research is the idea of untying knots that have in some way tightened aspects of our theology and teaching in unhelpful or unhealthy ways. These knots then influence the culture and practices of Catholic life and become very difficult to unpick.

In the previous chapter, we explored some of the cultural and systemic themes that emerged in our research indicating areas where our common life is unhealthy or dysfunctional because it fails to reflect our theological vision. It is often difficult to disentangle culture and theology or teaching, partly because Catholic teaching is extensive and contains many varied voices and expressions, and also because much of its content needs interpretation in diverse local contexts and experience. The process by

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which formal teaching comes to influence and in turn be influenced by local Catholic life is gradual and often messy and mysterious. But it is not impossible to shape and re-shape how people think and change the habits and practices by which we live. Neither is it inherently difficult to listen to and learn from the instincts and insights of different groups within the Church. Synodal processes are helping us to learn how to do this in a way that is deeply attentive to where the Spirit might be leading us.

It is clear from this research that some ideas and practices found in the cultural habits and structures of Catholic life reflect partial or distorted understandings of aspects of Catholic teaching. The child abuse crisis is asking us to recognise and examine these in the light of faith and prayerful listening to the Spirit and to see how we can grow into a re-balanced and more faithful understanding. It also brings fresh perspectives into view that can enrich Catholic teaching as it continues to unfold. This process is already happening in initiatives and theological work elsewhere but is less evident or visible here in England and Wales.

This is essentially a constructive and reparative process of learning and transformation. The child abuse crisis in the Church has wounded us deeply, harming the victims and survivors most of all. But as we have already noted, there are resources in Catholic teaching and tradition which will help us learn and change and act differently. These resources offer hope for whatever healing is possible if they are presented in a framework of humility and openness to the truth. This is not just about the best possible safeguarding policies and practices, nor even about generous redress and compassionate accompaniment of survivors. It is about our deeper beliefs about what it means to be the pilgrim people of God and how we live and express these beliefs in the practices, culture and structures of our common life. To follow this path, we must recognise the full depth of institutional failures and find the right ways to repair these.

A theological framework: a redemptive journey

In the light of this research, we suggest that the task now for all of us in the Church, both members and office-holders, is to seek the possibilities of redemption in relation to the experience of the child abuse crisis. We have to imagine and create the actions and pathways which might open us further to redemptive grace. Redemption in ordinary understanding involves making good something or someone that has failed or become involved in harm or other wrongdoing. In Christian faith, we see Christ as the redeemer of humanity; in the Gloria in celebrations of the Eucharist, we say ‘you take away the sins of the world’. Christ is the one who brings newness of life and the promise of salvation.

We understand the Church as a community of those who believe and trust in the redemption Christ brings. Redemption confronts sinfulness and opens up possibilities of hope leading to fulfilment of our true vocation and transcendent destiny. Redemption, although already achieved in Christ, is a continuing process in our lives of faith as we seek to live with our recognition that we always stumble and fail and need to repair and make good what has been lost or damaged or bound so tightly that it has harmed. When we do what is needed to restore what is right and just in our relationships and our common life, we take part in the process and gift of redemption.

the task now for all of us in the Church, both members and office-holders, is to seek the possibilities of redemption in relation to the experience of the child abuse crisis.

In the context of the abuse crisis, redemptive paths are those which restore what has been taken away from victims and survivors and which recognise with honesty and humility how, as a Church, we have failed and how we need to change. Most importantly, they are pathways of action, not just words, of signs given and commitments made and followed though.

The redemptive journey to which the abuse crisis calls the entire Catholic community needs a further theological perspective. The Church in its visible and institutional forms is called to live within and serve the purpose of God for all humanity and all creation, the purpose we call the economy of salvation. What matters most of all is our created common dignity and our transcendent destiny. We are called equally and communally to share in the divine life. This is of eternal significance; the particular form that institutional structures, ministries and offices take is not, as history testifies. Rather, they have emerged and can change in their expression as part of our search for what best enables our pilgrim journey in the Spirit towards the fulfilment that is only found in God.

This theological ground matters for the themes and questions explored in this chapter. When we see the Church in the larger framework of God's purposes and call, we can live more easily with its institutional failure and sinfulness. When we recognise our utter shared dependence on God and the radical equality of God's call to each person and to all of us as a body, we discover resources that critique clericalism, whether found in the habits and attitudes of priests, bishops or other members of the baptised. When we discuss the reasons for building a strong and practical culture of support and accountability for all who lead in the Church, we can base this on knowing that we are called toward salvation as a people, as a body of interdependent parts, owing to each other a duty of care and support but also challenge and truthfulness.

The most recent report on safeguarding policy commissioned by the Bishops' Conference, the Elliott Report, works from the same theological ground.[93] It begins with a strong affirmation of the theological foundations of the Church's safeguarding commitments and work, presenting this as a vocation. Based on the infinite dignity of each human person as created and loved by God, this vocation is 'intrinsic to our baptism'; 'we are the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:27); if one member suffers, we all suffer'.[94] So we are all called to solidarity with anyone who suffers from any kind of abuse. It is an act of solidarity to listen, as to the voices heard in this report, and to engage in the necessary work of reflection on cultural habits and practices that impede the renewal for which the report asks. It is an act of trust in the leading of the Spirit to engage in the theological work needed to identify precisely how our understanding needs to be renewed.

The discussions in this chapter are not 'finished' theology. They are pointers to work that needs to be done by theologians. They offer resources for reflection, discernment and prayer for all those charged with the ministry of teaching or leading in the Church. They sketch outlines of a theology that emerges from lived experience, from narratives and from the pain, courage, heart-searching and honesty of those who spoke to us.

Redemptive paths are those which restore what has been taken away from victims and survivors and which recognise with honesty and humility how, as a Church, we have failed and how we need to change.

2. Survivors as witnesses and the sinfulness of the Church

The testimony of survivors is compelling. Although as noted earlier each voice and each story is unique, the experience of listening with deep attention to what they have experienced and how they reflect on that experience revealed some significant themes.

Survivors' testimonies often express a desire for the truth of their experience to be recognised and acknowledged. Many ask a crucial question: do you believe me? It is a question freighted with moral urgency, both for the survivor and for the office-holder or listener involved. For the survivor, it is not just about whether the experience they describe actually happened. It is also about their dignity and moral personhood. It often reflects their hope that the Church, embodied in an office-holder or listener, will recognise that although the primary responsibility lies with the abuser, the institution is also implicated. When a victim or survivor's disclosure has also been mishandled, the moral balance shifts further. They ask: 'Why has his institution, which stands for what is good and preaches a Gospel of love, failed to care for me?' Implicit in their desire for truth is a question for the Church: can we recognise our own failure, our sinfulness?

First, their testimony compels us to recognise that the Church has been and still is a place in which abuse happens and in which institutional response has repeatedly failed and still fails, to the extent that many survivors have experienced that response as further or secondary abuse. This report has described the impact of that abuse and explored some of the cultural habits and ideas implicated in how abuse happens and how mishandling deepens the harm done. These narratives point to an uncomfortable perception: that there is institutional or structural sinfulness in the Church.

This can be difficult for many Catholics to acknowledge. We are taught that the Church is holy and spotless, an idea that seems to exclude sinfulness. We venerate the Church as both mother and teacher. It is painful and perplexing to work out how to reconcile these instincts with the reality of institutional failure as well as the failure of individuals who have perpetrated abuse.

Catholic teaching holds strongly that sin is first of all personal; but because we are social beings living in relationship, it is also social. Individual sin affects other people, as we see only too clearly in abuse and mishandling. Pope John Paul II spoke about how social sin develops not only in the acts of individuals but also in the failure of those who are in a position to 'avoid, eliminate or at least limit social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference', an understanding which reflects closely the idea of unethical passivity explored in the previous chapter.[95] Catholic teaching also recognises that the wrong acts or omissions of individuals create structures which then deepen and extend the impact of sinfulness. A structure may be a visible organisational reality such as a parish or a diocesan organisation, but it may also be a practice or a widely

established cultural habit such as defending the Church against criticism or assuming all the power in a parish belongs to the priest.

This understanding of sinful structures developed within Catholic social teaching where it has normally been used to examine economic systems and structures; but the principle also applies in areas of institutional failure in the Church. Pope John Paul II acknowledged this when speaking about ecumenism. The painful divisions among Christians have happened not only because of personal sins, he explained, but also because within the Church there are 'the sinful structures themselves which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcing of division'.[96] If there can be sinful structures within the Church which have led to enduring divisions among Christians, there are surely sinful structures which have failed to recognise and respond adequately to the impact of abuse and the search for justice of many survivors.

The Church is both holy and sinful

We understand the Church as both a human community, a pilgrim people, and as the body of Christ, the place in which we encounter Christ most intimately and we are drawn into his saving work. We believe that the Church is called to be a sign to the world, a sacrament of God's grace and a visible expression of the Gospel. Yet Catholic teaching is clear that the Church is 'at once holy and always in need of purification', and so 'follows constantly the path of penance and renewal'.[97] It also asserts that 'All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners'.[98] As Francis Sullivan notes, if the Church is always in need of reform, its leaders 'are fallible in every decision they make except when they solemnly define a doctrine of faith or morals'.[99] The Church in its institutional form and in its leadership would not need to be purified and penitent if it was not in some real sense sinful.

So we should take seriously what the abuse crisis reveals about institutional sinfulness in the Church and consider the implications. Sullivan continues 'As a people on pilgrimage, while it has a divine guarantee of arriving at the Kingdom of God at the end of its journey, it inevitably takes many a wrong path along its way. And yet, as God's people, it has a holiness given to it by the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit, which it cannot lose.'[100] We need to adjust the way we think and speak about the holiness of the Church; it is both holy and sinful and these are interwoven in many aspects of our life. When we recognise this, we know even more surely our need of grace to help us resist and overcome sinfulness.[101]

In this perspective, we can reflect on how the Church as an institution has handled the response to abuse. Has the way in which we understand the holiness of the Church impeded our willingness to see and admit institutional or systemic failure? We do confess our sinfulness in every Eucharist, but we tend to assume that this is about our individual and personal failures. We do not have a practice of pondering and recognising communal or institutional failures. Recalling the discussion in Chapter Six about bystanders and unethical passivity, do we need to learn a greater sense of communal conscience and responsibility? How and when might we learn to recognise the subtle yet powerful

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complicities and fears which have impeded recognition of abuse and of how we have failed as a Church?

It is difficult to speak of or recognise the sinfulness of the Church. It is much easier to speak of sinful individuals. It is also complex. Structures in the Church may be implicated in blindness and other forms of failure that have deepened the impact of abuse, but that is not all that happens through those structures. People act in them from good intentions and sometimes collude unwittingly or unwillingly with what may be harmful. Sinfulness, goodness and the openness to grace are often intertwined. But unless we recognise that structures can fail and can influence or allow wrong actions, we will fail to see all the dimensions of the repentance and conversion to which we are called by the voices and experience of survivors.

Holiness includes failure

There is another perspective on the holiness of the Church which emerged from some voices in this research. They spoke of struggling with ideas of holiness as perfection and of the Church as a perfect society. They saw saints portrayed as perfect in their holiness, an idea which separated them from our flawed humanity. As discussed in Chapter Six, priests were also assumed to be holy in the same way, changed by ordination. They explained how these ideas lost the sense of the humanity of saints and of priests, and indeed of the Church. Several voices spoke of the need to explore instead how holiness is a path of living with and accepting failures and weakness and of knowing our need of God's grace and forgiveness. We are dependent on, and need constantly to turn towards, the grace found in the sacramental life of the Church. Saints are models of this struggle more than they are models of pristine perfection, some felt. So too the holiness of the Church need not be the perfection of never failing or admitting its own sinfulness, but rather the acceptance of our continual need for grace and mercy on our pilgrim path. This is part of what it means for the Church itself to be a sacrament.

This is the framework in which it makes sense when a bishop asks for forgiveness from victims or survivors, an act that reaches beyond apology to a deeper sense of communal failure and sorrow. It is also the framework in which as a sacramental community we can lament our communal failure as well as pray for healing and growth. The annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors is an important step forward, but there may be more work to be done to express in sacramental terms our acceptance of communal failure and to recognise the possibilities of grace-filled change.

But unless we recognise that structures can fail and can influence or allow wrong actions, we will fail to see all the dimensions of the repentance and conversion to which we are called by the voices and experience of survivors.

Survivors and moral leadership

There is a real moral leadership in the testimony of survivors. Pope Francis writes often about the need to listen to those who find themselves on what he terms 'existential peripheries', places where people are wounded, where there is pain and injustice. The Pope

proposes that 'they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made'.[102] There are aspects of how we live and work as a Church that the testimony of survivors enables us to see. Their desire to expose the truth of their experience is one aspect of their moral claim, but so too is their need for some kind of restoration, often expressed in terms of justice. They are asking the Church to be fully what we are called to be by the Gospel; a community which defends and upholds anyone who is suffering and which shows what true justice means. Survivors are frequently also deeply motivated by the desire to prevent further abuse, to ensure that Catholic institutions change so that what has happened to them does not happen to any other children or young people. Sometimes their moral leadership reflects more of the Gospel than office-holders in the Church have shown in response to disclosures of abuse.

The teaching structure of the Catholic Church means that we assume that moral leadership is the task of the bishops because they are charged with this responsibility. It is intrinsic to their ministry. Yet we know from the abuse crisis that sometimes bishops fail as moral leaders either in how they mishandle allegations or respond inadequately to victims and survivors or in other areas such as inappropriate relationships or even abuse. We can see too the moral claims of survivors as teaching us something we need to know about becoming a church of truthfulness, humility and justice. In a pilgrim church on a journey of penance and renewal, we need to listen to moral insight that comes from such sources. We need to adjust our sense of who teaches, not to exclude or diminish the teaching office of bishops but to bring further resources of truth into view. As Pope Francis so often stresses, all have something to learn, and the dynamics of who is in the centre and who is on the peripheries change when we are open to the moral intuitions and experience of survivors.

3. Being able to be humbled: recognising we are a vulnerable Church

When we listen to the testimony of survivors of abuse and acknowledge the sinfulness of what has happened, it is humbling. As researchers, we have experienced being humbled by the courage and moral and theological insight of many survivors and of others in the Church who have been affected. Some of those in leadership positions – priests and bishops – spoke to us of how they too had been humbled, by listening to survivors or by the compassionate response of parish communities to a case in their midst. It has also been humbling for the Church as a public institution to find itself investigated and criticised by a statutory Inquiry, the IICSA process.

Being humbled can be seen as part of the journey of conversion of hearts for which Pope Francis asks and part of the penitential pathway discussed above. When we are humbled, we are realising that we are not as good or holy as we thought we were. We are also recognising that qualities we see in others disclose gifts of grace and love. Being humbled is probably good for us even if it disturbs our confidence or our consciences.

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We can see too the moral claims of survivors as teaching us something we need to know about becoming a church of truthfulness, humility and justice.

When we accept being humbled, we are accepting our own vulnerability. The capacity for and acceptance of vulnerability emerged as an important theme in this research. Vulnerability usually describes a condition in which we can be harmed or wounded. It is crucial to distinguish between vulnerability which is accepted and lived in a positive way, and vulnerability which is imposed. Imposed vulnerability is sometimes defined as precarity, being subject to forces which bear down on you and which you cannot escape or change. Any form of abuse exploits and enforces vulnerability in damaging and wrong ways.

Vulnerability is found in many of the groups of voices that speak in this research. In the early chapters, we described the vulnerability of children and the vulnerability of victims when they begin to disclose abuse. We also recognised the vulnerability of those in ordained ministries, particularly of innocent priests who fear the impact of an allegation, and of bishops who must balance multiple responsibilities to all those impacted by abuse, and to those who have committed abuse. Parish communities are also vulnerable, able to be hurt when a case of abuse or its mishandling touches their life, or when they are unsure about what to believe or what they know or not told all the available information. There was a vulnerability in everyone who spoke to us, created in some way, or deepened, by their experience in relation to abuse.

If so many groups within the Church are vulnerable, we are a vulnerable Church, a Church that is already wounded and able to receive fresh wounds each time there is another case of abuse or mishandling revealed, or a report published which confronts us again with our failings and yet again humbles us.

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It is not easy to see ourselves as vulnerable. In developing safeguarding culture we have become familiar with the concept of vulnerable adults, people whose age or capacities mean they need extra protection, and recognise too the vulnerability of children and young people. Those kinds of vulnerability require our full commitment to their safety and well-being, as does the vulnerability still carried by survivors of abuse. But we need not see only these groups as vulnerable. The vulnerability we all share when we face the knowledge of abuse and mishandling is also real. The philosopher Judith Butler explains vulnerability as part of our human nature as social beings. We are vulnerable to each other, she argues, because we are already bound together: 'This is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control.'[103]

The abuse crisis invites us to reflect more deeply on vulnerability, for ourselves and for the Church as a whole. It is not a weakness or a liability but a strength, even if it is sometimes painful to live. Pope Francis, meditating on the parable of the Good Samaritan, writes about the choices we face when we are confronted by those who lie before us wounded in some way. Do we choose to make ourselves vulnerable to the claim of the wounded person, or to be 'indifferent bystanders'?[104] He suggests that the question Jesus asks is not so much 'to decide who is close enough to be our neighbour, but rather that we ourselves become neighbours to all'. For Francis, the parable 'shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others'.[105]

There is a deeper theological theme here about God. We are made vulnerable in our humanity and that humanity is made in God's image. God chose to be vulnerable in his Son, Jesus. The image of the new-born Christ child is one of immense vulnerability, and the passion and death of Christ reveal his vulnerability. We are more familiar with the idea of God as 'almighty' and it can seem scandalous to speak of the vulnerability of God. Yet it may be an insight we need, prompted by what we learn from searching reflection on the abuse crisis. Vulnerability images the divine. We need not fear it; we can live it gracefully.

Vulnerability is important in relation to the abuse crisis in other ways. In earlier chapters, the research has described the importance of listening well to survivors. To really listen, we have to be vulnerable, as individuals, as office-holders and as a Church. In listening, we open ourselves to the pain of others and may hope to carry a little of its weight, even when it wounds us to do so. Listening is a witness we can offer in response to the witness of those from whom abuse or mishandling has taken something. Just as importantly, it is a witness in which it matters to be open about how we are affected, to let our vulnerability be seen, either in words or, as appropriate, in actions that express this sense. Being willing to be vulnerable and accepting our vulnerability communicates an offer of solidarity to those who have been unwillingly and harmfully made vulnerable. It could be described as a redemptive pathway for the community of faith and its office-holders.

4. Untying the knot of clericalism

Clericalism is one of the most complex knots that we need to disentangle and loosen. As described in Chapter Six, it is both a collection of cultural habits and a set of theological choices or interpretations. It is pervasive yet avoidable. It can be colluded with but also resisted. It is often largely unconscious or unnoticed. It involves all of us, the baptised and the ordained. It is deeply implicated in how abuse and mishandling have happened, and how the whole community has been wounded by its multiple impacts.

Clericalism takes different forms in each cultural context. Whilst this research relates only and specifically to the Catholic community in England and Wales, our communities and the priests who serve us are increasingly drawn from many other cultures and ethnicities. Cultures are always somewhat fluid and the cultures of our Catholic life in England and Wales are no exception. Cultures of priestly life are varied and will evolve as well. Sometimes those coming from other cultures may bring strong habits of clericalism or expectations of priests that become further entangled with existing practices and attitudes. Clericalism is not a single reality or experience.

Theological unpicking of clericalism is important. Unless we have some sense of what needs to be re-examined or re-balanced in our teaching and theology, we will lack the resources to guide cultural change. The child

abuse crisis is not the only reason for unpicking clericalism, but it is one important motivation. Clericalism impedes us being a community which is not only safe but also as fully faithful as we can be to the Church's own teaching.

Several strands emerge from the research data that illuminate the theological task here.

The first is not new or original but it is still disturbing. It is the sense that although it is now over 60 years since the Second Vatican Council began, we have still not managed to become a Church in which the full dignity of all the baptised is expressed in genuine sharing of responsibility and in relationships of equality and collaboration between priests and people. This is not the case everywhere; some parishes and some priests and pastoral teams have experienced such relationships working well. But it is still the case in far too many parishes that decision-making is barely shared, effective consultation is rare and relationships between priests and people are characterised by undue deference, passivity and submission. If the Council's teaching on the co-responsibility of the baptised is not reflected in our habits and cultures and structures, then the role and power of the priest becomes disproportionate. When that happens, everyone is less safe, including priests, because the cultural habits of passivity and silence described in Chapter Three are allowed to grow. We are then less faithful, less able to flourish as fully as God intends.

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This is not about a gap in Catholic teaching or theology. Catholic teaching in this area is very clear, expressed with the highest level of authority by Vatican II and then re-affirmed and expanded in Pope John Paul II's Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* in 1988.[106] Even today, Pope Francis has added his teaching voice. Speaking about the baptised, he says, 'room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making'.[107] So why do we struggle to develop practices and cultures which make this happen in practice?

Part of the answer may lie in how effectively this teaching is communicated and what kind of adult formation happens in a parish. But part of it probably lies in another strand of the knot which has also been discussed in Chapter Six, the way in which priests are seen and sometimes behave and are treated at parish level. There are structures and practices which communicate power and priestly ownership rather than collaboration and shared responsibility. The most significant example of this is what happens when a new priest or priests come to a parish. It is rare to find any example of a process that recognises that the life and activity of a parish is owned and built by all its members as well as being served and led by priests. There is commonly no process of handover or induction that models a theology of shared responsibility. The power of the priest seems absolute. Another example is the absence of shared decision-making structures. Even where structures such as parish pastoral councils exist, they are, in terms of canon law, merely consultative and they exist or are disbanded, used or ignored, as the priest wishes.[108]

Other strands need to be disentangled here. One strand is how canon law defines the powers and responsibilities of a priest in a parish. Such definition is necessary, but it should not be the primary principle

determining the style and culture of the priest's pastoral role in a parish. The teaching documents on priesthood do provide ample scaffolding for the role of the priest as 'governing' the parish but they also use many other images which are more reflective of the Gospel: the priest should shepherd the faithful, gather together God's family, take care of the faithful, lead their communities.[109] These texts describe a much more personal and relational form of priestly ministry, helping the community find its purpose and mission.

Recovering the priestliness of the baptised and adjusting how we view the ordained

Another strand is an element of the teaching of Vatican II that is almost always underplayed. The Council recovered and taught the principle that the whole baptised community is priestly. There are two forms of priesthood in the Church, the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood. In a crucial text from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium,* they are described as 'interrelated', or in a different translation, 'ordered one to another'.[110]

In other words, they need each other for the Church to be fully ministerial. The body of Christ is constituted by both forms of priesthood. Although the priestly ministry is to act 'in the person of Christ', the priest is still part of the body and his task is to enable the priesthood of the whole body to be living and active. When a priest is ordained, the recent version of the prayer of ordination begins:

> ***Draw near, Lord, holy Father,***
> ***almighty and eternal God,***
> ***author of human dignity and bestower of all graces,***
> ***through whom all things progress,***
> ***through whom everything is made firm,***
> ***who, by the power of the Holy Spirit,***
> ***in order to form a priestly people,***
> ***establish among them ministers of Christ your Son in various orders.***[111]

The task of the priest is to *form a priestly people*, not to hold all priesthood to himself. Priesthood is, as Pope John Paul II said, 'fundamentally relational'.[112]

Part of the difficulty may also arise from how the figure of the priest is seen in relation to Christ. Some of those who spoke to this research spoke about the priest as an 'icon of Christ', an expression that contributed towards an over-elevated idea of priesthood that risked diminishing priests' humanity. The teaching documents about priesthood speak at length about the priest's relationship with Christ, presenting priests as those 'called to prolong the presence of Christ, the One High Priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care.'[113] Priests are to be a sacramental representation of Christ and a sign of grace in the Church.[114] In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), we read:

> In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the

The teaching of Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist.

Para. 10, *translation on Vatican website.*

> Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis:[115]

The risk here is that when the priest's relationship with Christ is stressed in this way, it seems to omit the relationship of all the baptised to Christ. All the baptised are also called to be the presence of Christ in the world, to make Christ visible. This is expressed in words attributed to St Teresa of Avila:

> Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

If we talk about priests and priesthood in ways that too closely conflate the priest and Christ, the vocation of all the baptised is diminished rather than enabled. The priestly people also image Christ, and indeed are ontologically conformed to Christ, as Pope John Paul II taught:

> The new priestly people which is the Church not only has its authentic image in Christ but also receives from him a real ontological share in his one eternal priesthood, to which she must conform every aspect of her life.[116]

There is restorative potential in re-balancing how we commonly talk about priesthood, priests and the priestly people. It is worth recalling how one priest who spoke to us described his role. He saw himself as

> ***the person who can talk about what we all need to be doing, and he needs to express it in his own life, and the fact that that's his full time job, is there as a reminder to people that, in what they are doing, in their full time jobs, is as sacred as what he is doing.***

Priests who see themselves as part of the body, on the same level, can grieve with people when abuse happens and can imagine what is needed by way of communication and support. Priests who see their task as calling forth and celebrating the priestliness within the baptised people will enable their voices to be heard. If priests seem to hold onto priesthood for themselves alone, how will the priestly people discover its priestliness?

There are practical ways in which we can begin to change our culture and relationships. For example:

- In how we speak about priesthood, in preaching, teaching and formation, we should take care wherever possible to speak about it in relationship to the whole body of Christ. We have many ways of speaking which separate the priest from the rest of the body. We speak of priests 'celebrating the sacraments'; but we could take care to say that priests preside in the community's celebration.
- If we speak of priests as holy or sacred, we should also always speak of the baptised that way, as otherwise it seems that holiness or sacredness seem to belong only to priests. As Pope John Paul reminded us: 'Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful.'[117]

From Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992)*

The ministry of the priest is entirely on behalf of the Church; it aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire people of God.

Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church's mission.

Paras 16, 17

- We should try to avoid speaking about a priest as owning a parish, because the parish belongs to the whole community; the priest belongs to the parish rather than the parish to the priest. When there is a liturgical installation of a new parish priest, texts should reflect the theological and pastoral meaning of their role.

These are small habits, but they shape and could re-shape our thinking and culture.

Hierarchy, power and servanthood

One further strand also emerged. In Chapter Three, we reported the voices of a number of women who talked about clericalism and what they felt needed to change. Several spoke about the need to reconsider how we understand hierarchy. It is usually understood as 'power over', a sense that perhaps reflects a juridical view, because in canon law, bishops do have immense power. But here too, the texts of Catholic teaching frequently stress ministry as service. The assumption that hierarchical office means power over people seems to prevail over the idea of service and creates a culture which does not help us all to flourish.

In Chapter Six, we briefly quoted from an article written by James Keenan, a moral theologian, in which he makes a critical analysis of what he terms the culture of 'hierarchicalism', which he defines as 'the exclusive power culture of the episcopacy'.[118] He identifies this in how bishops are selected and in the lack of any real accountability for their actions. He argues that this leads to impunity, no consequences when they act wrongly. As noted in Chapter Six, Keenan recognises that this is now changing because of the abuse crisis, citing Pope Francis' document *Vos estis lux mundi* in particular, but he argues that the culture of hierarchicalism needs to be addressed.[119] He suggests that we can only dismantle clericalism if we also recognise and reform the attitudes and practices that express hierarchicalism. The remedy he proposes is a recovery of 'servant leadership' and an ethic or spirituality of vulnerability, made visible in practices such as listening and encounter with those who are hurting or angry and other ways that bishops might visibly be present to people as servants.

It is important to recognise how this is already visible. Many bishops already use the language of service when they speak about their ministry. But the right language is not enough. Another moral theologian, Enda McDonough, comments:

> The persistent danger is that the rhetoric of service will replace the harsh reality of serving. It is still very difficult for lay people to recognise in the privileges and practices of priests, bishops and pope their proclaimed status as servants.[120]

Yet there are roles and tasks a bishop must perform as they are charged with governance and leadership. How can a bishop exercise faithfully the responsibilities of governance yet also symbolise and enact servanthood in an authentic way? How can we learn, as the community of the baptised, to invite and welcome this? Can we set aside expectations that the bishop will always have the answers, will always take the central place and be seated at the top table? It is striking how Pope Francis has chosen

throughout his ministry to model service and leave aside privilege, in his decisions about where to live and in many smaller habits and gestures. Some of our own bishops indicate the desire for servanthood when they speak about their need to learn and their willingness to admit mistakes.[121] But these are only beginnings; a stronger narrative and practice is still needed.

Whilst Keenan was writing from a different context, the Catholic Church in the USA, and our context and experience of episcopal ministry is different, some parts of his analysis resonate with questions raised in this research. To understand why mishandling has happened and why many survivors have experienced fresh abuse in how office-holders in the Church have handled their cases, we have to think about what we need from bishops and what impedes this from happening. As we discovered throughout this research, this crisis reveals a praxis of episcopal leadership that has not met the hopes and needs of many who spoke to us. That praxis is formed by Catholic theology and teaching.

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Another theologian, Massimo Faggioli, has written about what he terms 'episcopalism', an unbalanced theological understanding of the role and structure of the episcopacy.[122] He suggests that Vatican II sought to respond to the incomplete ecclesiology of Vatican I by balancing the doctrine of papal infallibility with a strong doctrine of episcopacy giving pre-eminence to collegiality at the universal level. Faggioli argues that this led to a more centralized church in which the place of religious orders and their prophetic mission was side-lined and the bishops' relationships with priests and laypeople were unbalanced.[123] Whilst the notion of collegiality between bishops was a step forward, he explains, this was not extended to collegiality with priests or with the wider community of faith. In the decades after Vatican II, structures in which the baptised had some autonomy, such as lay associations, diminished, and there was a 'parishization' of Church life, 'at the expense not only of religious orders but also of other forms and spaces of Christian life'.[124] Finally he connects all this to the child abuse crisis, arguing it is a crisis 'not just of the episcopate, but also of the theology of the episcopate'.[125] Faggioli's reading of this area of doctrinal development resonates with themes in this research; the passivity of laypeople may reflect the absence of other spaces in the life of the Church where the baptised have some autonomy and agency.

Some of those who spoke in our research had close knowledge of how the Bishops' Conference worked and had experienced aspects of its culture. They expressed concerns about a culture that gave priority to finding consensus and remaining united, a habit which worked against individual bishops being able to take more radical initiatives when their discernment in relation to local and pastoral needs indicate that these are needed. This is perplexing ground. From one viewpoint, when individual bishops do speak and act with courage, vulnerability and transparency in relation to abuse, this is immensely valued. It helps and heals survivors and affected parishes and communities. But we also see in the wider Church that some individual bishops have spoken and acted in ways which seem damaging, in intemperate opposition to the Pope, for example. There is a role here for synodal processes, for a discernment about what the Gospel asks of us. Breaking of consensus or radical

leadership must be born from listening to the Spirit in the light of both scripture and the community's insights. It must always be transparently motivated by the Gospel; and it must also be attentive to those on the peripheries.

These perspectives do not set out to criticise individual bishops or to reject the role and ministry of bishops, individually and collectively. Rather they are questions about what a bishop is asked to be and to do, how bishops work together and what kind of leadership we need. They suggest a need to discern together how to change the unhealthy habits of deference and autocracy who do not serve us well. The child abuse crisis has already compelled change in aspects of canon law relating to bishops. It has shown us that leadership can fail, and that Vatican II's teaching that the Church is always in need of purification and renewal is reflected all too often in our actual life. The crisis may also point to ways in which our understanding of episcopal ministry may need to be re-balanced. Chapter Three described the complexity of their role, holding multiple sometimes conflicting responsibilities. Cardinal Walter Kaspar proposes a kind of untying of knots here, a process which he terms 'unbundling':

> In the course of church history, the fatal development has taken place that a charism, the charism of leadership, has drawn and absorbed all other charisms. Thus, a bishop today claims to be a teacher and shepherd, to exercise an apostolic and a prophetic ministry... The same applies to the pastor. The ideal here was for a long time that of an all-round man who does everything, liturgy and administration, building planning and individual pastoral care, teaching and club manager. Unbundling would be urgently needed here, not only because of the workload and the lack of priests, but also because the ministers have to be reminded not to extinguish the Spirit (1 Thess 5: 19) and to let all charisms have their say.[126]

It would be a sign of commitment to conversion if there was a way that voices from the body of the baptised could reflect together with bishops on their role and ministry, particularly in light of the issues raised by the abuse crisis, and imagine the changes that are possible.

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5. Accountability as redemptive

In Chapter Six we explored another aspect of the institutional life of the Church which is deeply implicated in the abuse crisis, the lack of accountability structures for priests and also for bishops, and the broader surrounding culture of relationships in which the habits and dispositions which support accountability mostly do not happen. We saw how this absence weakens priests and bishops themselves and also the communities they serve. We pointed to the importance of seeing support and accountability as closely connected and discussed the work that is being done in documents such as *Caring Safely for Others* and by individual priests and bishops to change expectations and set standards. We identified two forms of accountability in need of effective practical expression; accountability upwards for priests, an equivalent to line management, and accountability to the communities that priests serve.

Here we reflect on accountability in a theological perspective. This chapter has already discussed themes which shed light on accountability.

- The absence of accountability practices is an institutional gap, an area of organisational failure or even sinfulness.
- When we can and do hold each other to account, it is a practical expression of what it means to be a pilgrim church, always in need of renewal.
- It is also a counterpoint to the unhealthy habits of clericalism. Richard Gaillardetz points out that a distinctive priestly identity is not problematic in itself, but can become so when combined with systems that lack accountability.[127]
- When accountability is accepted and expressed in practical ways, office-holders accept a kind of vulnerability; but if accountability is freely chosen and skilfully prepared, it is a vulnerability which deepens ministry and spirituality.
- It has the potential to help build mature relationships of equality and respect between the baptised and those in ordained ministry.

In wider society, accountability is an ethical principle applied in many areas of public life. It is one of the seven standards set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 to operate as a code of conduct for politicians, civil servants and those who work in the criminal justice system as well as those in health and social care services. Accountability means taking responsibility for actions, decisions and policies and being open to scrutiny. It may of course lead to criticism and liabilities. Crucially, accountability cannot exist unless there are practices that enable it to happen.

Accountability is particularly important for those who hold power or have governance responsibilities in an institution, including in the Church. Some accountability practices already happen in Catholic institutions because they are required by charity law or other statutes. Financial accountability is practised and accounts are audited externally,

for example. It is a sign of significant progress that the new Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency is already engaged in independent audits of diocesan safeguarding practices and the agency's first such report is available on its website to anyone who wishes to see it.

In the Church, as we have seen from this research, some office-holders – bishops especially – recognise various ways that they are accountable but they also admit that in practice the structures which express and enable it do not exist. This is not so much a knot that needs to be untangled but rather some strands that need to be tied together or connected in a generative and practical way. The need for such structures, as well as the habits and culture that sustains them, and the openness of office-holders to try them out, need to be tied into a theological framework and a practical outflow.

A theology of accountability

The overarching theological framework in which to place accountability begins in the ultimate horizon of the economy of salvation. We are all accountable for what God has given us, individually and communally as the body of humanity living throughout time. We are inter-dependent, in need of each other's love and support if we are to live the life that God intends for us all. We cannot flourish or find fulfilment alone. Whilst our primary accountability is always to the creator who made us and always draws us towards divine life, we are also accountable to each other, in need of challenge and correction as well as love and forgiveness. Within this economy, the Church's task is to make visible the call to salvation, to be a sign and sacrament of all that is given and offered. So the Church should make visible in its own life what accountability means, in all its dimensions, as part of its mission.

Accountability in the Church should not therefore be seen or practised simply as a political or management exercise. It has a theological purpose which needs to be articulated and understood and then expressed in practical terms.

This work has already started. *Caring Safely for Others*, the Code of Conduct for clergy quoted earlier, is unequivocal about the importance of accountability for those in ordained ministry and locates this theologically in the centre of what it means to be ordained:

> In the same way, clergy must be prepared to be held accountable for their conduct and aspire to observe the highest standards of behaviour in the exercise of their ministry.
>
> The reason for this aspiration is that the standards for the exercise of the ordained ministry are derived from the divine law of love,[128] from the mandate for ministry received from Christ at ordination,[129] and from a vocation which places "a special obligation to seek holiness"[130] on those who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to live in a way which is conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ.[131]

This text is telling us that accountability is intrinsic to the priestly vocation and particularly to the priest's growth in holiness. It is an important affirmation of the intimate connection between the principle

When accountability is offered and visibly enacted, it gives away some of the power held by office-holders.

Archbishop Charles Scicluna speaks of accountability as redemptive, an idea worthy of profound reflection.

of accountability and the theological structure of ordained ministry which opens up questions about new pastoral structures and practices. How are the ordained to know whether they are reaching 'the highest standards' if there is no practice of listening to how people experience your ministry? How are they to discover the dimensions of holiness that practices of accountability might bring as their gift? Such processes should of course be careful and constructive; this is not about listening to every complaint but about recognising that we cannot grow in ministry (or in any other significant sphere) without the help of those with whom we share a common life.

This leads to a further perspective that emerges from this research. Archbishop Charles Scicluna speaks of accountability as redemptive, an idea worthy of profound reflection.[132] This suggests that making accountability real and practical is a way in which we turn away from paths that do not reflect the Gospel, and turn towards the paths of grace, truth and justice. The second *Letter to the Corinthians* (4:1) offers an idea which resonates with this: 'Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' The ministries and responsibilities to which people are called in the Church are ways in which we receive divine mercy. Accountability is, in theological perspective, an invitation to recognise the specific ways in which we receive that mercy. It plays a part in the search for holiness and for wholeness. It enables us to see our own failures and even sinfulness more clearly. It allows for grace to be given as well as wounds recognised.

This is powerful in relation to how we respond to the abuse crisis. When accountability is offered and visibly enacted, it gives away some of the power held by office-holders. It restores some of the power which should rightly be held by other parts of the baptised body. Most of all, it responds to the experience of victims that something has been wrongfully and harmfully taken from them. Acts and practices of accountability cannot give back exactly what was taken away but they are signs of a commitment to learn and to change. They have the potential to become elements of a mutual and reciprocal process of healing. They are acts of relational justice. They reflect ideas deep within Catholic sacramental practice of reconciliation; ideas such as contrition, penance and restitution.

Other theological perspectives extend a distinctive understanding of accountability in the light of Christian faith and Catholic teaching. Accountability in the Church also recognises our mutual dependence on each as members of one body. The description of what it means to be part of a body in *1 Corinthians* 12: 24-26 is very clear:

> God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

Holding each other to account is for the purpose of enabling all the parts of the body to function with 'equal concern for each other'. The *Letter to the Corinthians* is clear: no part of the body can say to any other part that I do not need you.

This scriptural principle is reflected in the teaching of Vatican II already cited about how the two forms of priesthood in the Church are inter-related. In a very real sense, each form of priesthood enables the other. Ordained priesthood without the relationship of priests to the community of the baptised makes no sense, and the priestly people needs the visible and sacramental ministry of the ordained in order to realise their own nature. In other words, we can see accountability in the Church as part of what we owe to each other because of the bonds between us.

A further perspective from Scripture that underpins accountability is the idea of stewardship. The parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew (24:14-30) challenges us all. We are all accountable for the gifts entrusted to us by the Spirit, called to be 'good stewards of God's varied grace'. (1 Peter 4:10). Offices, tasks, ministries and relationships are among those gifts. We have to use them for the flourishing of others.[133] In Chapter Three, we quoted *Supporting Ministry*, the report on appraisal for clergy, which drew on this principle in defining accountability:

> a priests' or deacon's duty to be responsible to God and others for using his gifts and talents in his ministry, office and other tasks entrusted to him.[134]

Supporting Ministry speaks of accountability both to bishops and to 'others', which includes 'giving explanations to those for whom his ministry and/or office make him responsible'. What it lacks, however, is a sense that accountability must be a dialogue. It is not a one-way process, either in secular life or in the body of believers.

A further point must be added. Even when the Church has grown into a stronger practice of accountability within its own life, it is still also required to be accountable in a public and legal way. The IICSA process was in this sense an exercise in public accountability, based on a legal paradigm. Even though it was uncomfortable and chastening for the Church as an institution and had its own weaknesses and difficulties as a process, it has been valuable as a source of learning and possibly redemptive insights. It revealed the experiences of victims and survivors in a public forum; and investigated institutional failures in the Church. In the Truth Project, it listened to victims and survivors at length. Daniel Philpot has written about truth and reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies and argues that 'the importance of learning the truth about past injustices is the most widely agreed-upon principle among the nation-states who have faced their past'.[135]

Philpot's observation points to a crucial element in processes of accountability. They are concerned with listening and facing up to uncomfortable truths. Sometimes this needs a particular and exceptional public form and expression when the situation is one of grievous harm and failure. In relation to the abuse crisis, this prompts a question: why has there not been any forum within the Catholic community in England and Wales in which victims and survivors could tell their stories and have their truth recognised? There have been many apologies and statements; and many private meetings in which victims and survivors have been invited to speak. But there has been no visible space which is both public and pastoral and which signifies to the Catholic community and wider society that victims and survivors can speak and the Church will listen.

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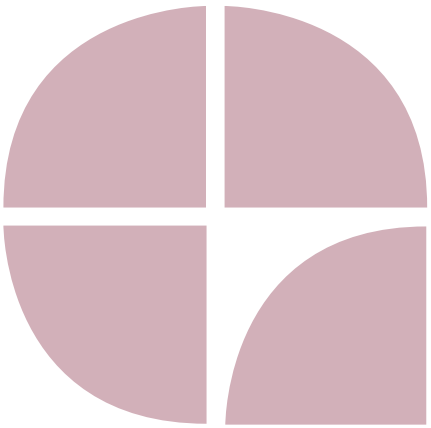
Accountability understood within the theological framework of the Church as the body of Christ and a pilgrim people may resemble and learn from broader secular ideas but it has a different meaning, depth and potential. Theologians are now exploring how accountability is implied by synodality, which we are discovering as 'the particular style' which expresses what it means to be the Church.[136] If we are better at practising accountability, if we can build a culture of structures and habits that express it, we will be a healthier and more faithful body. We will be better able to prevent the failures and harm of abuse and of mishandling. But we also still have specific work to do to recognise and listen to the harm already done.

6. Conclusion



This chapter has explored some of the redemptive pathways that we can take as a whole Catholic community in response to the abuse crisis. In each area, we have sought to uncover how the resources of Catholic teaching and tradition can help us learn from the abuse crisis and understand better what is asked of us. We have also recognised how some presentations of Catholic teaching become unbalanced and lead to habits of thinking and gaps in our practices that impede the full flourishing of the whole body of Christ.

There are some systemic habits here that cannot be changed at the level of our local church, although we can practice accountability upwards by asking office-holders to feed them back to relevant institutions, and in some cases, press for particular change.[137] We cannot, for example, alter the habitual way that papal teaching documents have talked about the sacredness of the priesthood in ways that seem to diminish or obscure the priestliness of the whole body of the baptised. Nor can we revise the role and responsibilities of a bishop as outlined in teaching and canon law, although we can ask questions and reflect on how culture and practices can evolve and experiment with new structures and processes.

There is much more that we can change that does not require new canon law or teaching. But the change cannot be compelled or practised just as a box to tick. Pope Francis' insight that what is needed is a process of conversion of hearts is crucial. Conversion is more than change. In theological terms, it is a process of recognising what is wrong or missing, of turning away from what is leading in the wrong direction and moving towards a deeper acceptance of the Gospel. Picking up themes from this chapter, conversion of hearts needs deep listening, an acceptance of vulnerability and an awareness that we need to challenge each other truthfully and compassionately in order that we can all grow. Although conversion may be a personal journey, it is also communal and needs theological nourishing. It is a process of attraction as much as one of stripping and repentance.

At the beginning of Chapter Six, we quoted several research participants who saw this experience of the abuse crisis and our collective response as pointing to how the Holy Spirit was awakening the Church and calling us into new paths. We also spoke at the end of that chapter about this material as prompting discernment as well as theological exploration. The theological exploration in this chapter arises from how we believe the Spirit speaks through the voices heard in this research; it is theology from the ground upwards, engaging with aspects of the theology we experience as coming down from the Pope and the bishops. Both are needed as we seek the possibilities of redemption.

Chapter Eight

What restores and redeems: new paths in a communal vocation

1. Introduction

One of the tensions that runs throughout this report is between the desire and the moral imperative to recognise fully the harm done by abuse and the failures in compassion and justice that followed, and the instinct of faith to believe and hope that we can do better. When we listen to survivors or reflect on what we have learned about the abuse crisis in our own local church, the desire to do whatever would help or heal or put things right is deepened. But listening itself is complex, particularly for institutions, and the temptation is often to try to 'fix' others rather than examine ourselves.

There is also a particular absence in England and Wales of a full independent review commissioned by the Church itself of the scale of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions and the failures in response. The IICSA process and its reports served a part of this purpose, but in a limited way and its recommendations dealt only with safeguarding and canon law. Even though there have been individual apologies from several bishops and a collective expression of sorrow and shame from the Bishops' Conference in response to the IICSA report, there has been little detailed explanation in formal public texts or processes of how such failures have happened.[138] Nor is there much communication about redress for victims or about change in wider dimensions such as those discussed in this report. Most importantly, there has been no visible forum within the Church in which the voices of victims and survivors have been heard and the institution and its office-holders have been seen to listen. Despite the series of expert reviews establishing and improving safeguarding practice commissioned by the bishops, many survivors still doubt whether the Church has really understood and changed.

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At the same time, as narrated in Chapter Four, there are signs that we are changing, that office-holders are visibly listening, that survivors' activism is creating new spaces and communities are also finding their voice and asking for greater transparency and justice. There are indications in this research of how much compassion, grief and desire for change is found in people's response when they are enabled to know and talk about abuse and its impact. There is anger too at perceived failures in leadership; but the anger is itself a constructive signal of the need for different ways of working and reparative action.

This part of our common life is continually moving between these poles. There are still people who have not yet disclosed their abuse to anyone or found the support they need. Others live with the impact of trauma affecting their lives or with anger or a sense of deep betrayal. Priests still feel vulnerable; communities still feel wounded; processes are still sometimes inadequate. But at the same time, a bishop recently invited survivors of abuse to speak about their experience during his installation, putting them at the centre of his ministry.[139] The LOUDfence project has been taken up by several dioceses. The Pope met and asked for forgiveness from a group of survivors from these countries who had long campaigned for acknowledgement of their abuse in a junior seminary run by a religious order, and brought them into dialogue with the current

leaders of that order, from whom the men received a long-awaited apology.[140] Most of the reports prepared in English and Welsh dioceses for the global Synod on synodality spoke about people's concern and distress about the abuse crisis.[141]

Three pathways

We hope and believe that this tension is a place in which the Spirit moves, calling us towards what restores and heals and ultimately what is redemptive. There are three central areas or pathways in which we have imagined what action and change might be possible and which we propose for wider discussion. These are based on what we have heard from participants in this research. We also draw insights from experience elsewhere of different approaches to the issues raised by listening in this way.

The first pathway recognises that there is more work to be done to make visible and effective an institutional and communal commitment to listen to victims and survivors in this Catholic community in England and Wales and take responsibility for what has happened to them. We explore restorative approaches which have been pioneered elsewhere.

The second pathway concerns parish communities, whether directly or indirectly affected. They also carry wounds of different kinds: to their trust in leaders; to their faith in the Church and in priests; to their sense of identity as communities committed to live according to certain moral values, however imperfectly. We explore how to create spaces for conversation, for learning, and for the expression of grief and lament.

The third pathway opens up how we can address the cultural habits and systemic issues that contributed to making the abuse crisis possible and which are implicated in its mishandling. We explore in particular the ways that we could leave behind the habits and practices associated with clericalism; and how a culture and practice of accountability might be strengthened in our communities and structures. We point to the need for theological work, for ***'new languages of faith'***.

Each of these pathways is potentially restorative. They may also be redemptive if we enter them with open hearts and prayerful discernment. If the path ahead is truly one of conversion, of recognising what has gone wrong and accepting the need to change, seeking a closer following of Christ, it will not happen only through new policies or even excellent standards in safeguarding practice, essential as these are. Rather, it will come from our hearts and from our life of prayer and the courage with which we listen to the Spirit in humility and sorrow. It will take different shapes in varied contexts, parishes, dioceses or other Catholic communities. It will embrace both discomfort and creativity. It will be marked by compassion and a sense of what justice means.

LOUDfence

LOUDfence is a project started in the UK in 2020 by an activist, Antonia Sobocki. In a LOUDfence event, ribbons are tied to a fence or other structure, inside or outside a building, as a visible display of solidarity with those affected by abuse. The ribbons represent the voices of victims and survivors and of those who wish to speak out in their support and defence. It breaks the silence so often associated with this experience and communicates a message to victims and survivors that they are believed. The LOUDFence charter found on its website emphasises that a LOUDfence will always 'seek to aid healing, repair and reconstruction'. When a LOUDfence takes place in a cathedral or a church, it makes a visible institutional commitment and witness. So far, a LOUDfence event has taken place in the Catholic Cathedrals in Birmingham, Cardiff and Plymouth. Others are planned and the idea is spreading across other Christian churches and internationally. Antonia Sobocki has presented the project to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in Rome, and it has received the blessing of Pope Francis.

See **LOUDfence https://loudfence.com/**

2. The first pathway: an option for survivors through restorative approaches

The first pathway starts from our conviction that the Church in these countries has not yet adequately listened to victims and survivors, reflected on what can be learned from their experience and acknowledged failures and harm. This is a task that must involve office-holders, particularly bishops, because they speak for and symbolise the institution. It asks for communal acceptance of responsibility, even though some may feel they had no direct part in the failures which have happened. It is a task that includes finding meaningful steps of repair and redress. This could be described as making an option for survivors, a willingness to see the Church and all its structures through their eyes and their experience.

This research indicates that such work is underway but it often happens in private conversations and personal initiatives. It is somewhat piecemeal and unseen, even if meaningful for those involved. These individual encounters and smaller initiatives are vital sources of learning and transformation. We describe in a separate panel one which took place during this research. But something larger and more public could and should be done which communicates to victims and survivors in a more powerful way that the whole Church has acknowledged our communal and particular failures and our need to change and that we wish to find a place of deeper solidarity with survivors. There is potential here to change the narrative and to provide the moral and pastoral leadership that both survivors and communities long for.

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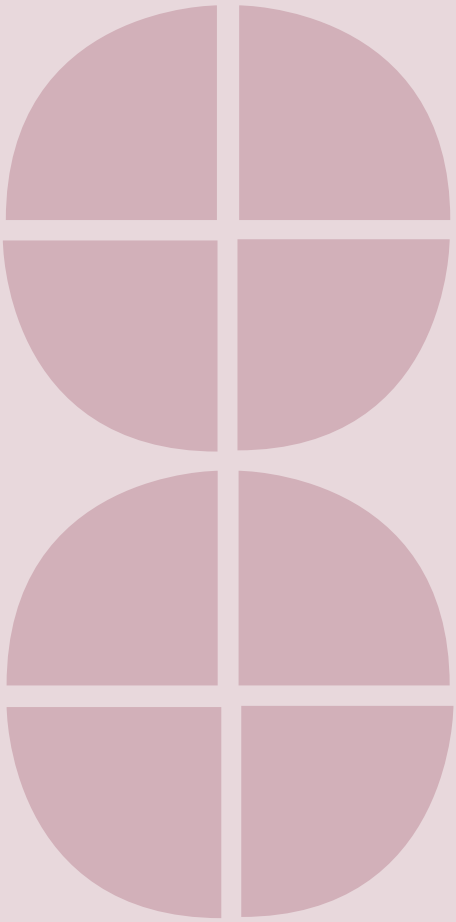
Our experience in a closed symposium

During the latter stages of the research, we planned a closed meeting bringing together a representative group of participants. Those who took part were survivors, laypeople, safeguarding staff, priests, bishops and religious. We met for two days. Our purpose was to share with the group some of the themes emerging in the research, and we engaged experienced and sensitive professional facilitators. We also made sure that a trained counsellor was present to offer support to anyone who needed it. We followed an inductive process; that is, we described in advance the headline themes emerging from our data and then asked the participants, in groups, to tell us what they would like to explore.



Although we gained helpful feedback on the research themes, what we learned from the experience about how to work together was even more valuable. The most significant part of the meeting happened in the small groups in which people encountered each other in a deeply human and respectful way. For many, this was transformative. Some of the survivors present felt accepted and heard by a Church which they felt had rejected them or which they had rejected. Others affirmed that the meeting 'stood on holy ground' and had created a community in a way that some thought would be impossible. It was costly: for the survivors, to explain their pain; for bishops, to hear again harsh criticisms of how Catholic systems work; for religious and priests, who discovered that even the clothes they wear may renew the pain of survivors of abuse. It was important that it extended over two days, so that relationships could be built, and a journey taken.

The invitation to participants to leave aside clothing or symbols that denote their role, ministry or state of life in the Church was not a questioning of their vocations. Rather, it was an act of solidarity and recognition of what was needed to make encounter possible. One priest participant commented afterwards that by foregoing the 'Father' and the collar, he felt he was fulfilling his priesthood more faithfully in this situation than had he not done so.

We learned a great deal from this experience. The role of skilled facilitators is vital. They create a safe space for everyone and guide the process so that it is purposeful but still flexible and attentive. Such meetings need commitments to confidentiality and pastoral support and an expectation that people are open to meet each other utterly as equals, with no titles or deference. It is helpful to find a neutral venue.

A conversation of this kind asks a great deal of all participants. Most of all, it asks survivors yet again to explain their pain, to bear that cost for a purpose we hope, but cannot know, will contribute to a larger healing. It is emotionally demanding for all those involved; but also an immense reciprocal gift and privilege.

It will rarely be possible to replicate such a conversation because of the resources required. But it is important to know that it is possible, when it happens with the right people and at the right place and time. A kind of reconciliation can tentatively be gathered, through people's discomfort and pain but also their generosity and courage.

Restorative approaches

We suggest that the most significant potential to change the narrative on communal and institutional response to victims and survivors of abuse may lie in exploring how ideas from restorative justice can be adapted and used.

- Those working in the field of criminal justice have become familiar with the concept of restorative justice, a process in which victims and the offenders who have committed a crime against them are supported by trained facilitators to meet and have a conversation in which victims can ask the questions to which they need answers, and offenders listen to the impact their actions have had and acknowledge what they have done. Restorative justice processes happen in many countries. They are always voluntary, that is, they only happen if both victim and offender consent; and they are collaborative, in that both parties share ownership of what happens.
- Healing or restorative circles are also based on the same idea. They work with an affected group, people who have experienced similar harm or trauma. They provide a safe space in which people can gather, talk about what has happened to them and discuss what is needed to make things right. They have a structured approach to conversation, often using a 'talking piece'. They happen in many different settings including prisons and schools.
- There are other models of alternative paths to a wider form of justice and healing when great harm has happened. Truth Commissions or Truth and Reconciliation Processes have happened in a number of countries where populations have suffered violence and oppression. They aim to enable the truth to come out about the harms and crimes committed, to assist victims and the whole of society to come to terms with the trauma and sometimes to consider reparations. They respond to a deep need of victims, the need to have the truth of their experience validated.

The Truth Project which accompanied the work of IICSA was an example of how this idea makes sense in relation to victims of child abuse. The Truth Project listened to over 6000 victims and survivors and made an important contribution to the Inquiry's work.[144] Victims and survivors of abuse in Catholic settings spoke to the Truth Project, but there has been no equivalent space within the Church.

Restorative Circles

Janine Geske is an American judge and practicing Catholic who now works in the field of restorative justice. She described a 'restorative circle' to which she invited different categories of people affected by abuse.[142] 'The process is quite simple', she says, describing listening to each other explore the harm done and how it can be repaired, using a 'talking piece', which is passed from person to person, 'allowing each individual to speak from his or her heart'. 'It is an incredibly spiritual and moving experience to participate in such a process', she comments. She quotes one of the participants, who spoke in tears; 'It's amazing. When we share stories of pain, there's healing in it'.[143]

Each of these models is based on principles which resonate deeply with themes from this research. Victims and survivors need their voices to be heard and believed; they need truthful answers to their questions; silences need to be broken; accountability needs to be accepted, and reparative support and redress need to be offered. When these happen in a visible public process, a counter-narrative to the experience of mishandling failures is available. The way in which restorative approaches could work in practice in the context of the Catholic community's response to abuse victims and survivors will not be the same as in prisons or other settings. But the principles work here too, not least because they align with Catholic theological and ethical understanding.

Barbara Walshe and Catherine O'Connell are restorative justice practitioners who worked with survivors of abuse in Jesuit schools and with the Irish Jesuits in a project described below. They explained what underlies their approach:

- It recognises the dignity and uniqueness of each person.
- It recognises that people are expert in their own lives.
- People want to make sense and meaning out of what happened to them.
- People can then explore what matters most to them.[147]

Walshe and O'Connell stress that restorative work is not therapy, although its outcomes may be therapeutic. It is a work of repair in which the harm does not dissolve or disappear, but its impact is acknowledged and accountability is accepted. Above all, it is victim-led and trauma-informed, which means it is sensitive to how trauma affects people's physical, psychological and emotional health and recognises their need for welcoming and safe places.

Restorative processes work on a different logic from normal criminal justice or legal procedures. As Daniel Philpot points out, rather than using an adversarial legal paradigm, they work on a reconciliation paradigm, an idea that Christians hold dear and which lies at the heart of Pope Francis' teaching in *Fratelli Tutti.*[148]

We would go further than Philpot and suggest restorative processes also hold redemptive meaning and potential. They are not an easy option. If done with care, honesty and commitment, they will challenge assumptions and habits built into Catholic cultures. We describe the Irish process at length below to indicate how much is asked of those who take part. But perhaps they are commensurate with the scale of the harm done, in the abuse and in the communal failures of response. They also create a new kind of space, a space which makes sense theologically for the Church. It is a space that is different from what happens in safeguarding practice but complementary to its purpose.

In looking at the potential of restorative approaches for our own context in England and Wales we are not suggesting replication of the process used in criminal justice settings whereby victims and those who have committed crimes against them meet for a structured conversation. Where the crime involved is a sexual offence, such processes should be facilitated by people with specific and expert training in this area. Some

A Catholic truth and reconciliation process?

In a recent article, Kate Jackson-Meyer, a Catholic ethicist, outlined a proposal for a global Catholic Truth and Reconciliation process for clergy abuse.[145] She argues that a global approach would unify what is currently a diverse range of responses and practices in different countries. Such a process, she suggests, responds to the vocation of the Church to be a healing and reconciling community, called to make relationships right 'through unearthing the truth, upholding justice and fostering forgiveness'. (p.238) Jackson-Meyer draws on St Thomas Aquinas to argue that truth-telling is required by a sense of justice towards survivors. She then outlines some practical considerations including the need for a joint clerical-lay leadership team, public hearings and gathering of testimonies in 'regional chapters' which in turn guide local churches, and adaptation to local cultural practices and traditions. She also suggests a 'consistent global reparations program that supports the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of survivors'.[146](p.243)

may think that restorative justice cannot even be considered in relation to sexual offences. But some survivors of abuse in the Church do want to meet their abusers, and a few have sought them out on their own initiative. For many others, their abusers are no longer alive or able to engage.

Rather, our interest is in the potential of restorative processes for whatever healing may be possible in the relationships between victims and survivors and the community and institution of the Catholic Church. They may also be helpful and offer healing for other 'secondary victims': for communities wounded by their knowledge of a case or of failures in response, for example. They may also work for priests who have suffered from a false allegation or who feel their life and ministry has been disvalued by the actions of those who have abused, or for priests who feel burdened and judged by the damage done to priestly ministry by the actions of those who have abused.

Restorative processes have the potential to embody some of the dynamics which this research has explored. They can empower people and give everyone an equal voice, acting as a corrective to clericalism and to habits of silence and passivity. They give priority to people rather than hierarchical structure. They ask participants to reconsider habits that operate without conscious choice, and they invite participants to be intentional about change. They must also be voluntary, which means that they can only happen if those who have been harmed are willing to take part. Their participation will depend on whether they are able to trust the process proposed and trust those who will facilitate it. When survivors are willing to take part, it could express a movement from retributive justice to restorative justice.

Restorative processes have the potential to embody some of the dynamics which this research has explored.

A Restorative Response to the Abuse of Children Perpetrated by Joseph Marmion SJ
Report by Barbara Walshe and Catherine O'Connell

In March 2021, prompted by a former pupil, the Irish province of the Jesuits issued a statement admitting that Joseph Marmion SJ had abused boys in Jesuit schools sexually, emotionally and physically from 1962 to 1978 when he was removed from teaching. This led to many other former pupils coming forward to share their experience of abuse by Marmion. The Order's safeguarding staff together with its provincial leaders discerned that the victims' needs might best be met by a restorative process, which would include 'authentic vulnerable engagement' by Jesuits themselves.

The Order commissioned two independent restorative practitioners to take this forward. The practitioners listened to sixty-two past pupils who were harmed and assisted them to engage with each other. They also facilitated conversations between past pupils and Jesuits for those who wished and eighteen such meetings took place. This led to a 'Past Pupils Agenda' emerging in September 2021 detailing the needs of survivors to understand and make sense of what had happened, be confident that change had taken place, and be acknowledged and offered some redress. The Irish Jesuits also investigated their own records on how Marmion's life and career had been handled and made public their findings.

The practitioners also spoke to twenty-seven Jesuits about their experiences of Marmion as a colleague, community member and teacher. A Jesuit steering group was formed to respond to the Past Pupils' Agenda. The practitioners facilitated meetings with both the past pupils group and the Jesuit steering group, separately and jointly. They then met with fifty-one Jesuits in a three day gathering for reflection on the Jesuit response and the testimonies of past pupils and discussion of what the Irish province now needed to do to respond to the harm done.

The report describes each stage of this process, quoting frequently from the voices of both survivors and Jesuits. The experience of abuse is fully laid out and the long lasting impact is powerfully described, detailing powerlessness, silence, shame and trauma. The narratives resonate closely with what we heard from survivors in this research, as does the desire to be heard and believed and the need for accountability and some form of closure. The accounts from Jesuits are also illuminating, a rare example of courageous transparency by male religious and provincial leaders about a brother priest and community member. Their testimonies echoed themes from this research about silence, bystanding, complicity and poor formation in religious community life. They also expressed humility, humiliation and a desire to do whatever they could to help those who were hurt. The Jesuits drew on resources from their Ignatian spirituality to understand how to respond and made specific practical commitments.

The final chapters narrate the difference that the restorative process has made, first to the past pupils who took part and then to Jesuits. For many of the former, it broke a silence of forty years. Most 'valued the support, the ability to be heard and to have their needs noted and the effort made to meet these'. (p.181) The facilitators reported that the process had enabled a level of healing for participants and for Jesuits, but there was also anger that it had taken so long. For the Jesuit Province, there was recognition that younger generations now 'carry the can' for abuse that happened before their time, and appreciation of the open dialogue that had taken place and admiration for the leadership shown by the Provincial.

There are several aspects of the Irish process that are striking. The first is that a past pupil who had been abused called the Jesuits to account and they heard the call and responded by setting up the process. It started from the cry for justice of survivors. The past pupils abused by Marmion were willing to expose their pain, a willingness that can never be taken for granted. In the words of O'Connell and Walshe, the Jesuits then 'listened to ***hear*** (our emphasis) rather than defend or explain'[149]. They also investigated their own records and made public how they had failed to stop the abuse and protect pupils. And they were willing to examine intimate aspects of their community life and culture and admit the weaknesses they saw. They made practical commitments to providing therapeutic support and financial restitution and to further change as a result of the conversations with past pupils. The leadership shown by the Provincial was crucial.

All these elements would help victims and survivors in a restorative process here in England and Wales or anywhere. Transparency about diocesan or religious community failures to recognise and remove or report abusers has often been lacking.

What would a restorative process look like in the local Church in England and Wales?

The Irish process began from the needs of those who had been abused or suffered harm. Any imagining of what is possible here needs a similar starting point. It should draw on and learn from those who have skill, wisdom and experience in this field and an empathetic understanding of the Catholic context. And it would need careful independent facilitation and the availability of pastoral support for participants.

A diocese could commission such a process, either when a parish community has been directly affected or when failures in response come to light, or because there are survivors of earlier abuse cases in the diocese who still feel unheard. It would need willingness from diocesan office-holders to give time to listening and to engage in an authentic and personal way. It would also need a willingness to provide the financial resources needed. One of the commitments involved is that some of us, whether office-holders or ordinary members of the baptised, need to be willing to listen on behalf of the whole institution and acknowledge harm and trauma, even though we were not personally responsible and had no direct knowledge of the situations involved.

Part of the value of such a process is that it is made public that it is happening, with appropriate ways to anonymise voices as needed, and an account of what has been learned is published. It should signal strongly that the whole Church desires to listen. It may enable other victims and survivors to come forward, feeling confident that they will be heard and listened to. It also creates a space in which failures in process and relationships, and in culture and systems, can be acknowledged, a space that is different from a legal process that frequently becomes adversarial.

Such a process could be both healing and generative. Truth-telling releases some pain. Listening to *hear* rather than to defend or explain allows us to accept and live with vulnerability. In a restorative process,

Pope Francis' vision of social peace

In *Fratelli tutti,* Pope Francis sets out a vision of social peace, which needs 'paths of renewed encounter' as well as truth-telling: 'Truth, in fact, is an indispensable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace.' (para 227) He cautions against silences which keep conflicts hidden or buried and argues that truth involves recognising the pain of victims of violence. He also suggests that 'We cannot move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory.' (para. 249) Although he is addressing wounds, violence and conflict in wider society, his teaching is relevant in relation to how the Church as a whole come to terms with the abuse crisis. Restorative processes contain many of the elements Pope Fran`cis identifies as essential in building social peace.

power is re-arranged as the victims, who have felt powerless, regain some sense of power and agency through speaking and being heard. A restorative process can also lead to practical outcomes which complement the work of safeguarding. In the Irish process, for example, a commitment was made to explore confession as a place of 'situational risk', that is, a situation that carries an inbuilt risk which needs to be acknowledged and mitigated.[150] It is also possible to explore redress in a setting which is less confrontational. In the Irish process, lawyers were also involved and redress was made, but they worked collaboratively to resolve matters alongside the restorative process.

There are other ways that a visible public restorative process could be imagined and enacted. The Bishops' Conference could commission an independent agency to plan and lead a project. This could allow for a process that was open to survivors across all the dioceses. It could also be entrusted to an appointed new group with relevant experience, perhaps working with an existing group such as the Isaiah Journey.[151] A parish or group of parishes could imagine and pioneer a local model, finding relevant expertise and using resources such as the Isaiah Journey's excellent *Guide to Listening*.

Restorative processes are not the only way to seek repair of relationships and make a visible commitment to a better response to survivors. Other possibilities are emerging, visible signs and actions that recognise the experience of victims and survivors and support healing. We have already mentioned the LOUDfence initiative, for example. A related project involves the creation of a healing garden in Northampton Diocese, a place of sanctuary and rest.[152]

It is beyond the scope of this report to propose a single model. But we suggest that work could be done to learn from relevant experiences elsewhere and develop models that could be tried, including consideration of a restorative process at national level. The specific purpose and parameters of each restorative process would need to be identified, taking into account any legal or criminal justice processes underway. Restorative and truth-telling circles and processes could sit alongside or come after legal processes if these are happening. Such work would need to involve survivors as well as those with practical expertise.

3. The second pathway: conversation and listening in parish communities

At one level, the practical imperative which emerges from this research in relation to parish communities is simple. We need to break silences; we need to learn to talk about the impacts of all the dimensions of the abuse crisis; and we need to listen to each other and see where and how we are moved to act in response. And within these conversations and processes, we need to lament, in the biblical sense, to grieve and repent, and find hope.

By ‘parish communities’, we mean parishes that have been directly affected and those that have not experienced any direct case but where people are painfully aware of the wider picture in their diocese or across the whole Catholic Church. We also include here priests and deacons and others in parish leadership roles. As explained in Chapter Three, they carry heavier burdens as a result of the abuse crisis. They too need to be able to talk, and listen, perhaps in spaces of their own, but also crucially with the people and communities to whom they minister. Religious also belong to parishes, as well as having their own community life to repair.

At first glance, this path seems straightforward, especially as we are learning synodal ways of being and working (discussed more below and on p. 134) but it is not. A parish community is a complex mix of needs, capacities and vulnerabilities. As we have already explored, some people don not want to think or talk about this issue. Sunday Mass congregations bring together ‘everyone’: children and frail elderly people, some with limited English, some with deep fears or other wounds, as well as those who long for change and the rich array of those who minister and lead in various ways. Unless a local or national event has prompted a direct impact, it is hard to imagine a way to engage a parish community as a whole in careful and compassionate reflection on this particular issue. Yet somehow we need to invite deeper understanding in the entire body of the baptised because the whole body is wounded. Part of this awareness already exists in the safeguarding practices that take place, and another part is growing in the observance of the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors, but there is a missing dimension. This is the opportunity to talk, listen, reflect and see how this crisis asks us to grow in faithfulness, and to bring to expression the instincts of faith of the baptised. It need not involve everyone; but it should be open to and offered to all.

somehow we need to invite deeper understanding in the entire body of the baptised because the whole body is wounded.

Two practical steps are needed.

The first step is the need to pay better pastoral attention to directly affected communities and their leaders. When a parish, or a group of parishes or a whole diocese, has felt the grief, anger, loss, betrayal or other emotions associated with a direct impact, there should be examples of good practice, tools that can be used, and resources of people and skills available. As we saw when listening to one parish where the immediate impact was handled with care and compassion (see p.93-96), it is possible to enable a faith-filled response which deepens the life of the Church, if the right things are done. It is important that this is considered as a long-term process. The impact does not cease when the events disappear from the news. Each parish has a history and a unique journey in its own place, and each community needs to travel its own path of grief, remembering and reconciliation.

Parishes could learn much from each other’s experience and from shared reflection across different dioceses and situations. Gathering insights and ideas about good practice would then benefit others and contribute to a maturing in pastoral response. It is not clear who has responsibility for this area in how diocesan structures and agencies commonly work. Neither does there seem to be any directly relevant resources or models, other than the Isaiah Journey Listening Guide already mentioned. This is a gap that could and should be filled.

The second step returns to the theme of synodality and is relevant to any parish, since it is likely that all parishes are indirectly affected. Throughout this research, the synergy between what is needed to break silences and repair ecclesial relationships, the talking and listening described above, and the exploration of a synodal style of being the Church, was striking. A synodal method of conversation, sometimes called 'spiritual conversation', was outlined in the preparatory resources for the 2023 Synod in Rome. It was practiced in many parishes and other groups taking part in the synodal consultation and seems particularly appropriate for exploring the issues raised by the abuse crisis. The synodal method is characterised by deep listening; it encourages an open mind and heart; it invites people to speak with courage and 'parrhesia' or boldness; it is suffused with prayer; and it is oriented towards discernment, gathering what we can glimpse of how the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

In some parishes or communities, a process of conversation in a synodal style focused on the issues raised in this report could be both healing and generative. The method described above draws on the deep faith of the whole body of Christ, the baptised people, and allows space for people to discern and imagine their own restorative or healing paths.

In practice, this could either be part of a larger synodal process which a parish is following in order to consider other questions and challenges, or within a diocesan process, or it could stand alone. Many of the parish and diocesan reports prepared for the national synod report speak of how valuable participants found the

Extract from the Synod on Synodality *Vade Mecum*

This extract from the official Synod handbook describes the method proposed for synodal conversation. It assumes that some material for prayer and questions for reflection have been circulated in advance. In the global Synod process, the questions were broad. If the intention is to heal the wounds caused and deepened by the abuse crisis, the questions would need to be carefully prepared for each particular context.

A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used. For instance, the Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment.

Participants form small groups of about six or seven persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds.

In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.

In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Finally in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker.[153]

process and how they desired to continue synodal conversations for their local parish life, not just to respond to the global process. In the national synthesis, the synodal experience was described as a ***'revelation'***, of people feeling they could speak freely for the first time and be listened to.[154] As the Liverpool Archdiocese report says about the people who took part there, 'it is clear that they want their voice heard. No longer is it possible to expect people to be silent.'[155]

We found, in this research, that people entered conversations about the impact of the abuse crisis with deep seriousness, honesty and a searching of heart and mind. They valued taking part. Many said afterwards that they had been glad of the opportunity to consider issues which they knew were important but they had never been asked to think about within their faith and Catholic belonging. People may be fearful of this issue; but when we create a safe place and a structured and prayerfully prepared method of conversation, and work with synodal values and principles, then it becomes possible to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us about the wounded body to which we belong.

There are already imaginative resources for prayer and liturgy on these themes available in the Isaiah Journey web pages already mentioned several times. All the resources prepared for the annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors can be used at other times, as the Isaiah Journey group suggests. The questions that could be addressed in the synodal listening will differ depending on whether the parish or community has been directly or indirectly affected.

In planning a synodal conversation which will explore these issues, it is crucial to consider how the voice and experience of victims and survivors can be heard. We have already commented on the problem that directly affected communities often have no way of hearing from the victims of an abuse case or allegation which has touched their parish life. The protection of the privacy and rights of victims is clearly the priority here, but there will also be other factors such as legal processes which make this difficult or impossible. There is also the dilemma discussed earlier: why should survivors have to describe their pain, again, so that others can learn? Yet without hearing victims or survivors speak about their experience, a vital part of compassionate understanding may be impeded. Sometimes it may be possible to find a route to invite survivors to take part and speak for themselves, if this is done with respect for their freedom and well-being. For some survivors, it is a mission they take up despite the cost to themselves, because they see that the Church needs their help for its own healing. The Isaiah Group resource already mentioned, *Listening with Love*, could also be used, and some survivors have written memoirs which are valuable sources to help others understand. Diocesan safeguarding staff may be able to suggest other ways forward.

There is one further aspect of using a synodal conversation style to explore these issues which needs particular care. It is possible or even likely that victims and survivors of abuse in other settings or in the Church may be present. Whoever plans and leads such conversations needs to ensure that there are people available to accompany or provide support if and when anyone becomes distressed or seems at risk. This may be a trained counsellor or someone who has other relevant pastoral

We found, in this research, that people entered conversations about the impact of the abuse crisis with deep seriousness, honesty and a searching of heart and mind. They valued taking part.

experience and skills and knows the resources available to provide more help. We recommend again the Listening Guide, and the churches' sponsored agency, Safe Spaces, and the survivor-led group, Survivors Voices.[156]

Space for lament: 'grief needs to be attended to'.

From this research, we have noticed the desire for another form of response which can be imagined at the level of parishes or dioceses. People expressed grief and sadness about all that has happened in the abuse crisis. Some explicitly described the need to lament, an unusual idea, but one that is deeply rooted in scripture. Lament is found throughout the psalms and the prophetic books of the Bible. It is an appeal to God to listen to suffering and pain; 'Give ear to my words, O Lord.' (Ps 5).

We noted in Chapter Six how Catholics tend to feel we should not complain or criticise, and how this can lead to a kind of collusion with clericalism. But there are forms of complaining that are valid and necessary. Some anger is rightful and linked to virtue, for example. The idea of lament helps us explore how to express these difficult feelings in a safe and constructive way. Lament is first of all addressed to God. It is a way in which we can express the pain of communal failure to live up to our communal vocation, our ethics and values. It is an opportunity to struggle with the reality of distorted relationships, fearful silences and other failures in which we see our own brokenness and that of others and of the systems we create and tolerate. Lamenting names what is happening or has happened. It builds common ground and creates a space for reflection and contemplation.[157] It helps us come to terms with realities.

Lamenting is also a way we express grief. As one research participant said, 'grief needs to be attended to'. When painful feelings are expressed and heard, it can lessen the pain and create space for people to move on. Catholic liturgy is rich in rituals and rites which enable us to express various forms of grief and sorrow: in a requiem; in a service of reconciliation; in the Good Friday liturgy where we reverence the cross; in anointing those who are sick. Catholic practice recognises that rituals involve people physically as well as spiritually and emotionally, which is why they are important in healing, especially in relation to trauma. Could there be a ritual through which we express grief over the particular failings, harm and trauma of abuse? The LOUDfence project is a start, creatively showing what is possible when we start from what is deeply felt. There is work to do here about how we can use familiar and new symbols and rituals to express what we need to say. Bradford Hinze's proposal that lament energises hope and nourishes the desire for a better way forward gives this added potential. Rituals of lament could play a part in the conversion of hearts which we seek.

Prophetic Obedience: *Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church by Bradford Hinze*

Bradford Hinze explores lament in both the Old and New Testament and suggests that we can understand lament as 'an expression of the indwelling agency of the Spirit in a suffering church and world'[158] Lament, he suggests, generates energy. Listening to authentic lament is 'a work of prophetic obedience to the voice of the Spirit in the church and the world'. (p.89) Drawing on biblical scholars' work, he points to how lament is part of prophetic criticism; it pierces numbness, challenges acceptance of 'the way things are', and energises hope. (pp.128-9) He also suggests that what often lies within lament is a desire for things to be better, particularly when there are 'frictions, frustrations and failures present in the church'. (p.87) These may reveal deeper aspirations and hopes. He then draws on the Ignatian idea of discernment to suggest that criteria are needed to help us 'heed, differentiate and learn from laments that arise in the Church'. (p.88)

4. The third pathway: different choices in building our common life

This pathway is much broader and longer. It concerns all the changes in habits and attitudes that will gradually help us grow into more mature and faithful relationships and practices. It is a pathway in which new understandings of teaching and theology can help us to imagine and bring about change. It is a path along which anyone can tread, built in part by countless small individual choices, but which also calls for communal awareness and larger commitments.

Changing habits and attitudes is slow patient work, but it is also work that can happen within many existing strands of local church life and relationships. In this report we have examined how a fresh interpretation and re-balancing of some elements of Catholic teaching and theology could nourish this work and locate it as a path towards greater faithfulness. We can intentionally look for and create new habits which signal different ways of building our common life.

In Chapters Six and Seven, we have described the unhealthy dimensions of our culture which have come to light through the abuse crisis and explored the theological resources which will help us unpick knots and retrieve principles that offer possible ways to grow and change. A range of themes are covered, but the two which stand at the centre of many concerns arising in this research and which also feature in most of the synodal reports are about clericalism and about the lack of practical accountability structures. The echoes and resonances between what people desire in their active belonging to the Church, as expressed in synodal conversations, and what might help to repair the damage done to the whole body by the abuse crisis are insistent.

We can intentionally look for and create new habits which signal different ways of building our common life.

Growing out of clericalism

There is no single answer or plan or strategy that will eradicate clericalism. Nor is it possible to do so in a 'top down' way, although leadership that models and invites change is vital. Rather, it is a task for everyone, in multiple aspects of our shared life, in our conversations, attitudes, assumptions and relationships. It is not only in response to the abuse crisis that this change is needed. It is an imperative arising from what it means for the whole Church, the whole body of the baptised, to be as deeply alive and faithful as we could be. In earlier chapters we have suggested some of the directions which could be followed:

- Breaking silences and resisting passivity: choosing to talk about what seem to be 'no go' areas, such as celibacy and sexuality in relation to priesthood; communicating transparently and fully the detail of what has gone wrong when victims of abuse experience mishandling; exploring the kind of leadership we would like from our bishops.
- Consciously adjusting attitudes and habits related to how we speak about priests and priesthood and about the baptised: avoiding talking in ways that assume that the holy or the sacred is only found

in the ordained; avoiding deference; building relationships in which feedback is reciprocal, disagreements are possible and decisions are explained and can be challenged; providing formation to help people understand more fully their baptismal priesthood and their own holiness.

- Thinking together about some of the habits which many see as supporting clericalism; could we more often drop titles, for example? What are the implications for clerical dress and when is it needed? Can we learn to avoid 'special treatment' for priests or bishops at social or other events?
- Thinking together about how best to manage responsibility for all that happens within parish life, so that we move beyond the idea that the priest is responsible for everything and his permission is constantly needed. This is already happening in places where parish mergers and new clusters or families of parishes are requiring new structures and new arrangements so that there is a real sense of shared responsibility and collaboration. There is also new interest in a revived and less bureaucratic way of forming parish councils to work in a synodal way.[159]
- Actively committing to greater transparency at all levels from the parish to the Bishops' Conference; moving from a default of secrecy and non-explanation to an assumption that everything possible should be explained or accessible. This is composed of many smaller actions which could include: publishing the agenda of Bishops' Conference meetings and some of the papers unless they specifically require confidentiality; creating spaces in which people can ask questions and receive explanations about diocesan decision-making; asking people what they want to know. It could also include such practices as bishops and priests being willing to talk about where and how they find support and accountability.
- Considering how to achieve greater transparency and involvement of the baptised in the appointment of bishops. Although the formal process is handled by the Nuncio and in Rome, there could be ways to ensure more voices are heard in composing an account of what is needed in each local church, an account that can be fed into the formal process. There should also be more transparency about the stages and timing of the process. This is a task on which the Bishops' Conference here can engage with the Nuncio and relevant authorities in Rome.

None of these are particularly new. Each will already be happening in some places. They may also seem somewhat distant from the implications and shattering impact of abuse. There will also be resistance, from both people and priests. They are still important. There is still a long way to go and much to learn and explore.

A powerful sign

There is one practical step which mostly does not happen and which is often a source of pain in parishes. This is the problem, already mentioned in earlier chapters, of what happens when a priest leaves a parish and a new priest arrives to minister there. There is rarely any discernible process of handover or any sense of how induction should happen and how the parish community and its leaders might arrange and be involved in this. There is usually no opportunity for any dialogue between the bishop and the parish community about what is needed. The message this gives about ownership and responsibility for parish life and mission may be correct in relation to canon law, but it undermines any sense of shared responsibility and mature collaboration. Sometimes it leads to great loss as incoming priests drop structures, change practices and introduce their own preferences in ways that distress and dishearten people who have been lifelong active members of a parish.

It is hard to understand why this is so neglected. Why can we not find an appropriate and careful way of managing a change of priests in ways that respect and affirm the capacities of a parish community to shape its own life? It is not just that consultation about what is needed in a role vacancy, and handover and induction, are commonplace in so many other sectors and other Christian churches. It is profoundly about our belief that the Spirit works through the gifts and voices of all the baptised, and the principle in Catholic teaching reviewed earlier about the interdependence of the two forms of priesthood. To be the priest that a parish community needs, it makes sense to have a structured ordinary expectation of good handover and induction.

This does not mean that a parish vets or selects who is appointed. The task of making appointments gets increasingly difficult as there are fewer priests available. But it could enable the bishop to have conversations with priests about appointments that take into account what the relevant parish community has said about its own life and its needs. This should help priests too. It provides a starting point for the priest's ministry when he arrives in a new parish.

Synodal approaches can help here too. In an ecclesial way of arranging handover, which may learn from professional models elsewhere in some regards but which most of all needs to be rooted in what it means to be the body of Christ, listening and discernment will be vital.

New practices in this area would be a powerful sign of a church which is not burdened with clericalism. This is a matter of pastoral processes; it need not require change in canon law. It would be helpful too to examine the texts used in the rite of installing a parish priest, to see what messages are conveyed and ensure a balance between recognising the proper canonical responsibilities taken on by a parish priest and the primary importance of the theological vision of shared baptismal responsibility for a common life of discipleship and mission, led and served by the ordained.

It is hard to understand why this is so neglected. Why can we not find an appropriate and careful way of managing a change of priests in ways that respect and affirm the capacities of a parish community to shape its own life?

The potential of self-binding

There is one other idea which could be useful here, one which relates to new priests coming to a parish, including particularly a parish that has been directly affected by an abuse case or by mishandling at some level. It is also relevant to new bishops coming to a diocese or to how either bishops or priests might offer a different kind of leadership in the aftermath of an abuse case.

This is the idea of self-binding or pledging, of a bishop or priest choosing to commit to certain courses of action or to new practices of collaboration and listening, whether or not they are covered by canon law.[160] It might include a commitment to follow through the decisions made by a diocesan Synod before these decisions are known, an act of visible trust in the Holy Spirit active in the Church. At parish level, it might mean a new parish priest making a public commitment to change as little as possible for the first three months and then to listen and dialogue about what might be done differently. It might mean a defined commitment to transparency in the aftermath of a failure related to abuse cases or mishandling. Such acts call for courage; they also invite mature and faithful response.

Self-binding is not an alien concept for Christians. Baptismal commitment is a form of self-binding and so too is marriage or ordination or the profession of vows in religious life. We commit to accept to live in a certain way and to rule out other ways of living. In a positive way, it has resonances with the idea of covenant, recalling God's covenant with his people. Self-binding is a commitment to do something or to give up something for the sake of a larger flourishing of self in relation with others and with God. In the structures of Catholic life, it also represents giving away some of the power which the ordained ministries have accumulated, a process which some will fear, but which could be freeing and restorative, and even redemptive.

Self-binding commitments are also a way into practices of accountability, the other major theme which we believe needs to be addressed in practical terms.

Practices of accountability

It is striking how often the theological literature about the abuse crisis discusses the need for accountability, and how little is teased out about what this looks like in practice. In earlier chapters, we have explored the different elements associated with accountability and the kinds of accountability which need fuller practical expression; between bishops and diocesan communities, and bishops and priests; and between priests and the communities they serve. We have also noted the kinds of accountability which already operate in our UK context through wider legal and financial instruments and now through the independent work of the CSSA. We took account of the code of conduct for the ordained, Caring Safely for Others, which is promoted by the Bishops' Conference and is an essential tool in building practices of accountability. We also sketched some theological horizons which frame accountability from the basis of Catholic faith and teaching.

The American Bishops' Pledge

In 2002, following a series of painful and shocking revelations of the scale of child abuse in the Catholic Church in America, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.[161] They added a further text, A Statement of Episcopal Commitment. In this, they said 'We pledge that we bishops will respond to the demands of the Charter in a way that manifests our accountability to God, to God's people and to one another.' They pledged to assist each other across their provinces to interpret and implement the Charter correctly and agreed to be bound by it if accused of abuse themselves. They reaffirmed this commitment in 2018.

The earlier sections of this chapter have significance in relation to increasing practical accountability.

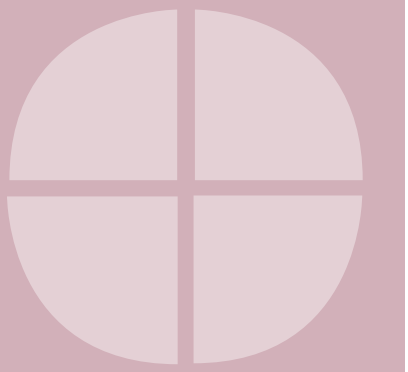
- Restorative approaches and processes include a dimension of accountability, for example. They provide a safe and structured space in which answers can be sought and failure can be admitted. They enable a response of the heart, with whatever steps of redress then emerge, including compensation if that is what is needed, but based on a paradigm of relationship and repair rather than a legal calculus or adversarial legal process.
- Synodal processes also build relationships in which a culture of mutual accountability can flourish. Myriam Wijlens is a professor of canon law and an expert advisor to the Synod of Bishops. She has written about how the current synodal journey 'has begun to give shape to the theological understanding that synodality implies accountability and that realizing accountability requires acting as a synodal Church'.[162] She draws on the vision of Cardinal Grech, who leads the Synod Office in Rome, speaking about the 'circularity' of the Synodal process, as the people of God discern together and offer their wisdom to the bishops, who in turn exercise their teaching role, prompting further 'prophecy and discernment' and so the process continues. Wiljens applies this to the decision-making of leadership too. 'This is what accountability is about; listening deeply to each other, checking what was heard, then making a decision.'

These practices work from a deeply Catholic relational and theological framework. They are also formative and possibly transformative. They engage the whole Church rather than a single layer of hierarchy, expressing our communal responsibilities to each other.

What else can be done?

Some parishes or dioceses, or individual priests, may wish to explore practices that are now standard in many fields of professional life, testing and adapting them so that they fit in the light of a Catholic theological understanding of ministry and accountability. Annual appraisal, for example, is intended to help a person flourish and be effective in the work for which they are responsible. There is no incompatibility with the ecclesial vision of accountability outlined here and in the documents quoted. Appraisal is commonplace in Catholic schools and in many Catholic agencies. Pastoral supervision as described earlier on p.117 is also a valuable option alongside appraisal, or the model of pastoral accompaniment which is being developed by the JPII Network.

There is space here for both leadership and imagination. There is also an opportunity to make visible and public a new level of commitment to accountability. There may be many elements of accountability which already operate below parish and diocesan awareness; but if the community of faith, and survivors of abuse in particular, do not see these or know about them, it is hard to build trust in how we can change in the light of the abuse crisis.



Accountability practices in dioceses elsewhere

In the Australian Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle, a process of three year review is in place for parish priests, accompanied by a range of other resources for professional development including a Clergy Supervision Programme.[164] The three year review process is a 360 degree process, that is, key people in the parish such as those who chair the parish council or pastoral team, and the finance committee, and 'at least six parishioners' are invited to respond to a questionnaire giving feedback.

In the Archdiocese of Vancouver, a 2019 report on sexual abuse by priests proposed that 'All clerics… should undergo an annual formal performance review', carried out by a group of people including lay men and women. The Archbishop agreed to put such a process in place, starting in 2022.[165]

There is more work to be done here than this report can imagine or propose. There is a heartfelt desire to be a church in which accountability, understood and re-imagined in the context of Catholic faith, happens in practical and visible ways.

5. New languages of faith

Within each pathway, theological work can make a vital contribution. This research has explored how limited or distorted theological understanding lies within some of the attitudes, habits and culture of our common life. We have talked about these as knots that need to be untied, or in some cases, strands that need to be better connected. In the extract from the Synod document at the beginning of Chapter Seven, there is affirmation that 'new languages of faith' can flourish 'in the furrows dug by the sufferings of every kind endured by the human family and by the People of God'.

Theologians have a vital role here, as do bishops as teachers of the faith. But so too do all the baptised, as we too have instincts of faith and capacities to discern what is true and what gives life to our common discipleship. The theology we need, in the light of this crisis, emerges from deep listening and dialogue between bishops in their teaching ministry, theologians in their vocations and other members of the baptised, from the experience of living Catholic faith. All of us together can seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and hope to receive it more fully.

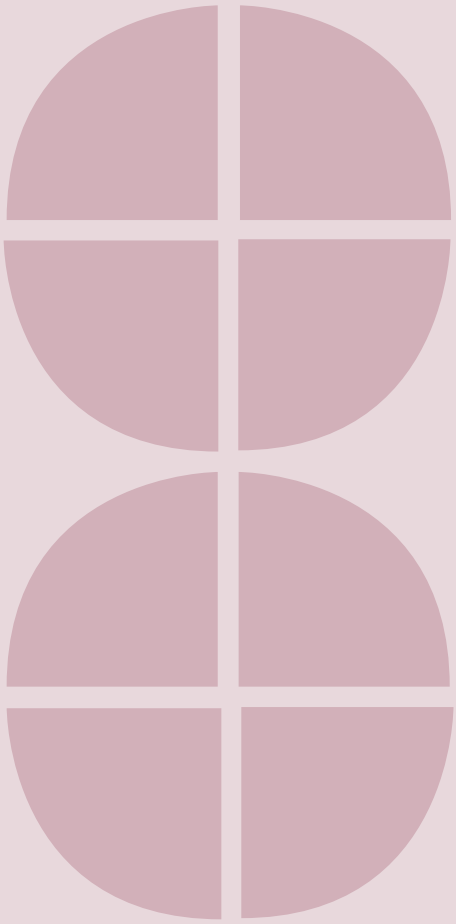
Some of the theological work needed arises directly from the themes explored in this report. We could explore more deeply what the vulnerability of the Church and of the baptised means, for example. We should work at theological re-balancing of the way in which the priesthood of the baptised and the ordained priesthood relate to each other and re-consider how ordained priesthood is explained and understood in teaching and practice. Our understandings of sinfulness in the Church and of forgiveness are also implicated and our penitential liturgies could be expanded. Our understanding of how the Holy Spirit works in the Church for its health and wholeness could be explored more fully.

We also need to go further in building a theological foundation for practices which the abuse crisis has taught us are necessary. Practices of accountability and safeguarding can learn much from wider professional expertise, but to be truly rooted in our ecclesial life, they must draw from and deepen our theological understanding of ourselves and our mission. So too the development of restorative approaches to those harmed by abuse must be underpinned by a clear theological rationale. The principles of Catholic social teaching and the explorations of those principles found in the wider field of Catholic social thought have much to offer here. Theological understanding of synodality in the life and mission of the Church is expanding rapidly, but it does not yet reach many parish communities and synodal processes raise questions which still need to be addressed.

There are also areas in which there has rarely been open dialogue and where such dialogue could contribute much to the conversion of hearts for which the Pope calls. The way in which bishops exercise their role of leadership and teaching, for example, affects our life together as a Church and emerges as a concern from the abuse crisis. In this area, as in others, it is important to understand the theological principles and the formal teaching which govern their reality, and to listen to their experience. But the work of theologians and the instincts of the faithful are also valid and needed. All these together can point towards revised theological understandings and new practices. The call to conversion of hearts and practical action involves the bishops too.

Other theological horizons may be opened up when people read this report and respond with new questions. There is always more to be found in the faith of the baptised when they are invited into prayerful reflection on what happens around us and within us.

> It is the task of the whole people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to listen critically, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to contemporary utterances, to interpret them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine word.
>
> *Gaudium et Spes* para. 44



6. Conclusion

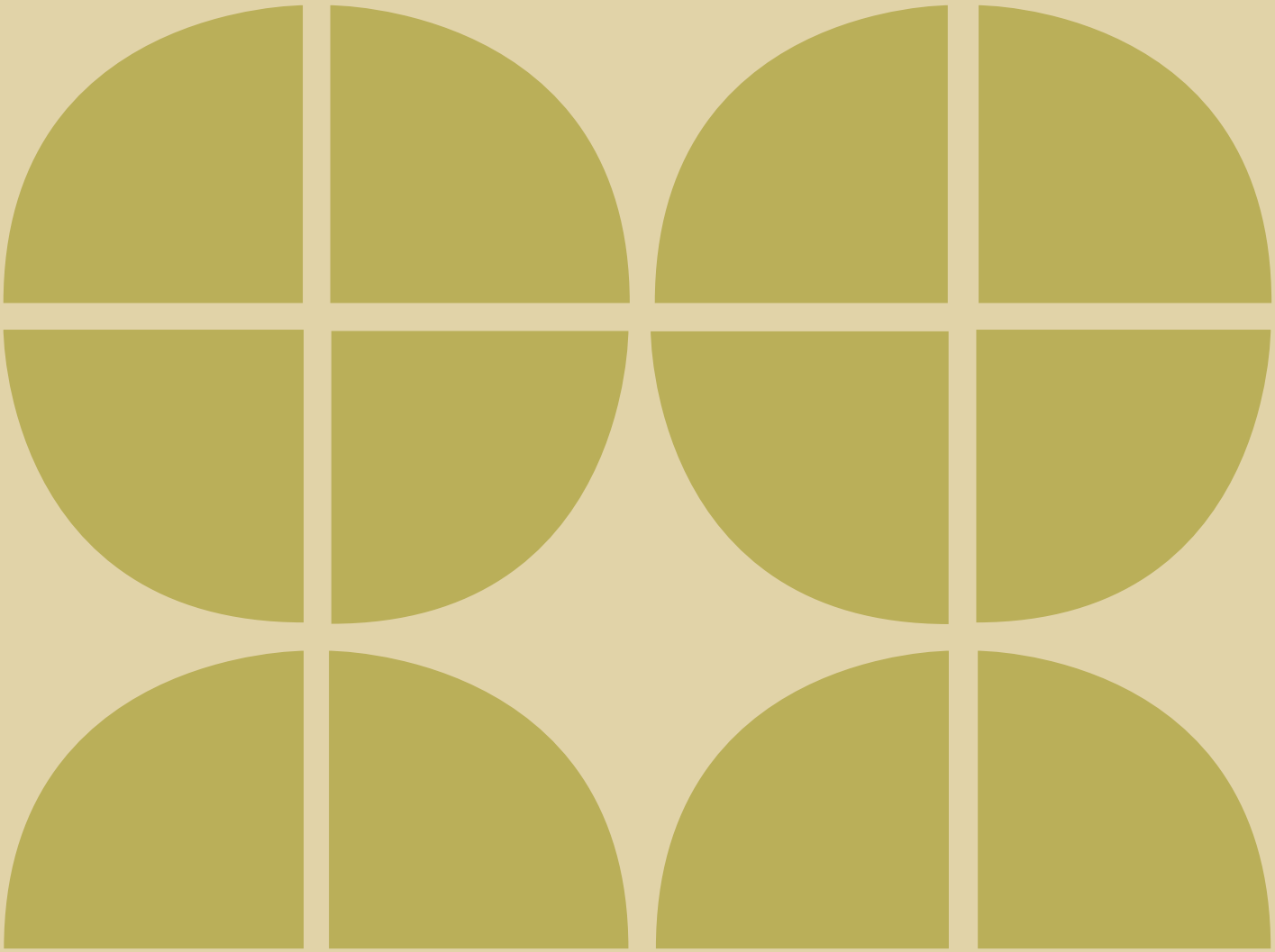
The theme running throughout this chapter is one of trusting that the Holy Spirit is active in the body of all the faithful and will open up for us the paths to take, if we are courageous, patient and prayerful as a body and willing to listen to and learn from all the voices through whom the Spirit speaks. But it comes with a caution: we have to turn our repentance, grief, hope and desires into practical steps, as Pope Francis insists.

We pondered during our writing whether the report should conclude with recommendations. We have not taken this path, although this final chapter has tried to imagine some of the possibilities. Our intention in exploring these possible futures is to invite others also to imagine, to find the right local solutions, whether in a parish or diocese or religious community, or in the Bishops' Conference. If our response to the abuse crisis comes from our hearts, if it is truly conversion, it will have its own motivation, character and shape, rather than being compelled by any recommendation here. If it is truly guided by the Spirit, it will lead us to a deeper living of the Gospel, to a church of greater compassion, humility and justice.

We affirm again in closing this text, that the Church's response to the abuse crisis is unfinished. We have more work to do. Much of it is work we have been needing to do for some time and for many other reasons. The utter pain of abuse happening and our failures in response make this work more urgent and reveal the scale of what is needed. How can our promises and willingness to change, and our practical action, be commensurate with the damage done, most of all to victims, survivors and their families, but also to the whole body? How can we, as the whole Church, together seek redemption and greater faithfulness? What does it mean in practice to be servants of this task?

Chapter Nine

Afterword: What happens next?



We close this report with some deep convictions and invitations.

The first is gratitude. We are deeply grateful to all those who participated in this research, particularly those to whom abuse has caused great harm. It is an act of courage and solidarity to take part in research on such a sensitive matter. In each person who spoke to us, we heard integrity and witnessed soul-searching. It has been a privilege to listen to them and to draw out the fragments of truth and insight which are the gift of the Spirit.

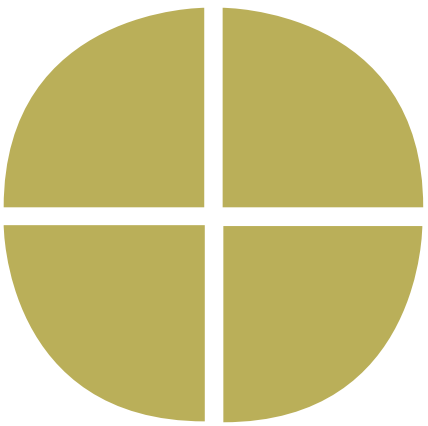
The second is a conviction that the response of the Catholic Church in England and Wales to the victims and survivors of abuse is not yet adequate or complete. Although safeguarding practice is well established and independent auditing is underway to ensure high standards are met, there has been no visible communal process at a significant level of listening and learning from those who have carried the worst of the harm done. As explored in the last chapter, our proposal is that restorative approaches could offer the most valuable way to explore what repair is possible and what kinds of justice could be done. This is an opportunity for showing the kind of leadership for which people hunger and thirst.

This conviction leads to an invitation. We hope that people will learn from this report what the abuse crisis has been like for so many people within and sometimes now outside the Church; those directly wounded and those who hold leadership roles, as well as many others among the baptised. To some, particularly office holders, the narrative of the early chapters here may offer little that seems new, as they have been coping with abuse and its aftermath for some time. But this broad portrait is not available to the majority of church members, which in turn impedes the whole Church from understanding and engaging in a compassionate response.

We hope that reading the report will provoke questions, reflection and prayer. This report follows a certain path, from people's experience, to the habits and attitudes in Catholic culture that are implicated, and then to the ideas in Catholic teaching and theology which need to be rethought. We would not claim that these are the only lines of interpretation. Rather, we invite more thought, more reflection and above all, discernment. Where does this report take your own conscience, faith and prayer? How do you hear the Spirit calling us forward in the light of all the voices that speak in this text?

We need to continue conversations of this kind. We invite reading together: at parish level, perhaps in groups convened by safeguarding representatives; by priests and deacons, in whatever settings support supportive and transparent reflection, and whenever possible, in conversations which involve laypeople and religious; and by office-holders, also in settings which include others.

Some capacity for action in response is possible for all of us. We can all choose in small steps to grow out of clericalism; to resist and break silences; to take responsibility. We can all bring these concerns and the people whom they have affected into our prayer, and we can support the initiatives which make visible both the pain and failure which needs recognition and the desires and possibilities of all that helps and heals.



Appendix

Further Reading and Resources

There is an extensive literature of theological work related to the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, both in books and in journal articles. Most of the journal articles, including many of those cited in this research, are behind paywalls or require institutional access, usually through a university library. The titles below are all either available by open access, with no charge, or can be ordered online for modest costs.

The books, journal articles and Catholic teaching texts cited in the endnotes are not repeated here.

Memoirs from Survivors

Stephen Bernard, *Paper Cuts: A memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2019)

Graham Caveney, *The Boy with Perpetual Nervousness: A Memoir of an Adolescence* (London: Picador, 2017)

Brian Devlin, *Cardinal Sin: Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Columba Books, 2021) **https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/stolen-lives**

Peter Murray, *Swimming with Medusa: One man's journey through abuse to hope* (Burleigh, Australia: Zeus Publications, 2014)

An external perspective

Richard Scorer, Betrayed: *The English Catholic Church and the Sex Abuse Crisis* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2014)

A bishop's response to the abuse crisis

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007)

The experience of priests

Barry O'Sullivan, The Burden of Betrayal: Non-Offending Priests and the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandals (Gracewing, 2018)

Other theological writing

Daniel J Fleming, James F. Keenan SJ and Hans Zolner SJ, (eds.) *Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the Face of the Abuse Crisis* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2023)
The complete book is open access, i.e. available to download from the Catholic Theological Ethics for a World Church website:

Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the Face of the Abuse Crisis (Complete Book) | Published in Journal of Moral Theology (scholasticahq.com)

Bradford E. Hinze, *Confronting a Church in Controversy*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2022)

Richard Lennan, *Seeking the Right Side of History: Theology and the Sexual Abuse Crisis*. Lecture given at Villanova University. November 2019

200304+-+PAPER+-+IAG+Governance+Symposium+-+Richard+Lennan.pdf (squarespace.com)

"Seeking the Right Side of History: Theology & the Sex Abuse Crisis" - YouTube

Shelley Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017)

On prevention and pastoral care and support

Jane Chevous, Laura Fischer, Concetta Perôt, Angela Sweeney, *Safe, Seen, Supported: How to help and reach children and young people experiencing abuse in their households* (March 2021) available at

SafeSeenSupôportedReport_JC-LF-CP-AS.pdf (survivorsvoices.org)

See also the *Survivor Involvement Ladder* developed by Survivors Voices
Survivor Involvement Ladder – Survivors Voices

Brendan Geary, *Child Sexual Abuse: What is it? How should it be dealt with? What is a Christian response?* (Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Pubs, 2009)

Joanne Marie Greer and Brendan Geary (eds.) *The Dark Night of the Catholic Church: Examining the Child Sexual Abuse Scandal* (Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Pubs, 2011)

Sarah Nelson, *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse: Radical Approaches to Prevention, Protection and Support.* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016).

Resources to use in groups

Stolen Lives is a project from Root and Branch, a forum and movement for reform in the Catholic Church. See **Home | Root & Branch Synod (rootandbranchsynod.org)** for an explanation of the movement itself and follow the links to the Stolen Lives webpages. Root and Branch have produced a valuable learning resource available here **Stolen Lives Learning Resource publication copy.pdf**

The resources from the Isaiah Journey have already been mentioned several times in the report: see The **Isaiah Journey - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** for all their material.

Reports on the child abuse crisis in the Catholic Church and Catholic institutions in other countries

Scotland

Bishops' Conference of Scotland: *Statistical Review of non-recent Cases of Abuse. An analysis of Religious records from 1943 to 2005* (February 2018)

See **Safeguarding (bcos.org.uk)** for statistical reports including this title as well as reviews of safeguarding policy and practice.

France

Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE): Final Report (October 2021) Also known as the Sauvé Report A 32 page summary in English is available at **Final Report - Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (ciase.fr)**

As a result of the report, the French bishops set up the National Authority for Recognition and Reparation (INIRR), an independent body which works to offer financial reparations and restorative measures to the victims. See **https://international.la-croix.com/news/ethics/sexual-violence-addressing-the-emergencies-within-the-church-in-france/18686**

Ireland

Commission of Investigation: Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, July 2009 (The Murphy Report)

C-04 Murphy Report Entire Ireland - DocumentCloud

Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Dublin: Government Publications, 2009) also known as the Ryan Report)

The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (childabusecommission.ie)

USA

Karen J. Terry, Margaret Leland, Katarina Schuth OSF, Brenda Vollman, Christina Massey, *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010: A Report Presented to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by the John Jay College Research Team (2011)*, available at

The-Causes-and-Context-of-Sexual-Abuse-of-Minors-by-Catholic-Priests-in-the-United-States-1950-2010.pdf (usccb.org)

Australia

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: *Analysis of Claims of Child Sexual Abuse Made with Respect to Catholic Church Institutions in Australia* (2017) available at

Research Report - Analysis of complaints of child sexual abuse made with respect to Catholic Church Institutions in Australia - Institutions of Interest (childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

Notes

1. Pope Francis, *Vos estis lux mundi*
Apostolic Letter in the form of "Motu Proprio" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis "Vos estis lux mundi" (Updated) (25 March 2023) | Francis (vatican.va) p.1.

2. For more details of the members of both bodies, see
Boundary Breaking - Durham University.

3. A safeguarding plan aims to ensure that those about whom there are concerns or where allegations have been made or who have been convicted of relevant offences against children or adults and have served their sentences, are supervised and supported. They are agreements which identify risks and set in place strategies to manage these. For more information, see the Practice Guidance section of the CSSA website;
Practice Guidance (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

4. A separate report on the research methodology will be published later.

5. **The Charter for Engaging Survivors – Survivors Voices**

6. Pope Francis, **"Evangelii Gaudium": Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013) | Francis (vatican.va)**

7. See p.134 for an explanation of synodality.

8. See the appendix for examples.

9. National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC) *Annual Report 2015* p.35.

10. NCSC *Annual Report* 2019. p.32.

11. NCSC *Annual Report* 2018 p.66.

12. NCSC *Annual Report* 2019.p.33.

13. Stephen Bullivant, *Allegations of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales between 1970 and 2015: A Statistical Summary*, **Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales between 1970 and 2015: A Statistical Summary - St Mary's University Open Research Archive (stmarys.ac.uk)**

14. Bullivant, p.18.

15. Bullivant, p.26.

16. This is a wider trend. See Massimo Faggioli and Mary Catherine O'Reilly-Gindhart. 2021. 'A New Wave in the Modern History of the Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church: Literature Overview, 2018–2020', *Theological Studies*, Vol. 82 (1) 156–85.

17. **Integrity in Ministry - Religious Life Safeguarding Service (religioussafeguarding.org)**

18. Ian Elliott and others, *Independent Review of Safeguarding Structures and Arrangements in the Catholic Church in England and Wales (Elliott Review)* **Independent Review Safeguarding Report 2020 Re-Format 4 (cbcew.org.uk)** pp.72-5.

19. Elliott Review, pp. 6-7.

20. See **Home - cssa (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)** and **Religious Life Safeguarding Service (religioussafeguarding.org)**

21. Elliott Review, p.47.

22. **National Tribunal Service (NTS) - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

23. **Caring-Safely-For-Others.pdf (cbcew.org.uk)**

24. **Prayer for Survivors of Abuse 2023 - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

25. NCSC *Annual* Report 2019, p.17.

26. **Apostolic Letter in the form of "Motu Proprio" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis "Vos estis lux mundi" (7 May 2019) | Francis (vatican.va)**

27. See, for example, Christopher Lamb, **Fr Hans Zollner resigns from child protection body (thetablet.co.uk)** 29th March 2023, and an interview with Baroness Sheila Hollins at **Home | Root & Branch Synod (rootandbranchsynod.org)**

28. IICSA, *The Roman Catholic Church: Investigation Report* (November 2020) **The Roman Catholic Church:Safeguarding in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales (cbcew.org.uk)**

29. *Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, p.122.

30. **Safeguarding - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

31. See George B. Wilson SJ, *Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), Chapters One and Two, for a fuller explanation.

32. This was the case even though this research was carried out within the CCS, which is independent of the Church but works collaboratively and constructively with many Catholic institutions.

33. See Lovett, Coy and Kelly, *Deflection, denial and disbelief*. The authors note that although this was a 'popular' theory in the 1980s and 90s, there was a lack of clear evidence to support it. P.9

34. Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006) p. 209.

35. Marcus Meschler, 'Clergy Sexual Abuse as Moral Injury: Confronting a Wounded and Wounding Church' in Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan SJ and Hans Zollner SJ (eds.) *Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the Face of the Abuse Crisis,* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2023) 122-149 p.122.

36. Marcus Meschler, Kandi Stinson, Anne Fuller, Ashley Theuring, Measuring and Exploring Moral Injury Caused by Clergy Sexual Abuse. (Xavier University, 2022)

    Xavier (Cincinnati): Measuring Moral Injury – Taking Responsibility (fordham.edu)

37. *The Catholic Parish: Institutional Discipline, Tribal Identity and Religious Development:* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1996) p.104.

38. Synodality is explained on p.134

39. **Documents and Publications - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

40. It is a limitation that we were not able to listen to more deacons. It would have been desirable.

41. A celebret is a letter from a bishop or a provincial leader of a religious congregation which confirms that a priest is in good standing with the Church. It may be required if a priest wishes to celebrate the Eucharist in another diocese or country.

42. See Chapter One for explanations of the Nolan Review, the One Church approach and the Valladolid meeting.

43. Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World,* (2003) **Pastores gregis (October 16, 2003) | John Paul II (vatican.va) para. 22.**

44. The Nolan Report is explained in Chapter One.

45. Other research shows that there is a low rate of recidivism among male sex offenders who have received treatment for their offences.

46. See Chapter One for more details.

47. To protect anonymity, in this section we use only the generic terms 'office-holders' and 'leaders', to cover this group.

48. The names and ciphers (IICSA codes) of those requested to supply documentation or witness statements can be found on pp 139-142 of the IICSA Report on the Catholic Church. They include twenty-five bishops and priests, at least twenty-five safeguarding volunteers and staff and thirty-five 'complainants' (survivors).

49. The Elliot Review recommendations are explained in more detail on p.86

50. *Catholic Council for the IICSA – Recommendations Action Plan*, available at **Microsoft Word - 2021.04.30 - IICSA Recommendations - Response Paper FINAL.docx (cbcew.org.uk)**

51. Bullivant, p.9.

52. Bullivant prefaces his analysis with cautions about 'the problematic nature of *all* statistics', noting that researchers stress that a large proportion of abuse is never reported and that Catholic data from dioceses and religious orders is often scanty or incomplete. pp.6-7.

53. Bullivant, p.10.

54. *NCSC Annual Report*, 2019, p.24.

55. See the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium (1964), paras. 40 and 42 **Lumen gentium (vatican.va)** and Pope Francis, *Gaudete et*

Exsultate (2018) paras.6-18. **"Gaudete et exsultate": Apostolic Exhortation on the call to holiness in today's world (19 March 2018) | Francis (vatican.va)**

56. **CSSA Audit Reports (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)** The report was commissioned by Archbishop Malcolm McMahon following the resignation of Bishop Byrne in December 2022, and published in June 2023.

57. **Home | Grief to Grace (grieftograceuk.org)**

58. **Safe Spaces England and Wales – Safe Spaces England and Wales**

59. **Religious Life Safeguarding Service (religioussafeguarding.org)**

60. **The Isaiah Journey - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** The resources provided by the group include material for use on the Day of Prayer and for other forms of pastoral and spiritual response to victims and survivors of abuse. The group's members include people with liturgical and other expertise, religious and survivors.

61. Bernard G. Prusak, 'Who Knew? The sexual-abuse crisis and 'epistemic injustice'. *Commonweal,* October 10, 2022 **Who Knew? | Commonweal Magazine**

62. Brendan Geary, 'Witnesses in a fragmented world' in *Open House* **Open House Scotland - Online Magazine December 2019.**

63. Lovett, Coy and Kelly, *Deflection, denial and disbelief*, p.6.

64. IICSA, *I will be heard*, **I will be heard | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse** p.87-88. Only 5 per cent of victims experienced that they were believed.

65. See *Practice Guidance Management of Concerns and Allegations*, CSSA **Practice Guidance (catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)** pp.1, 5, detailing other actions that must be taken.

66. Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz, *Beyond Bad Apples: Understanding Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem and Cultivating Strategies for Change*. **Beyond Bad Apples - Ignatian Center - Santa Clara University (scu.edu) p. 5.**

67. *Address* by Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment (October 3, 2018). **http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html**

68. Nicholas Senz, 'What is 'Clericalism'? *Aleteia*, 23.08.2018. **What is "clericalism?" (aleteia.org)**

69. Thomas G. Plante, 'Clericalism Contributes to Religious, Spiritual, and Behavioral Struggles among Catholic Priests' *Religions* 11, 217 (2020), p.2.

70. *Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (Barton, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017) p.68. Cited by Gerard A. Arbuckle in Abuse and Cover-Up: *Refounding the Catholic Church in Trauma* (New York: Orbis Books, 2019), p. 50-51.

71. Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, p. 42.

72. E. T. Vasko, *Beyond Apathy: A theology for bystanders*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) p.22.

73. *National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023* Synod, released Sept. 19th 2022

    US National Synthesis 2021-2023 Synod.pdf (usccb.org) p.6.

74. The theme of accountability is also relevant to bishops and is considered separately later. It is also relevant to deacons, but there was no material in our data that connected clericalism to permanent deacons.

75. *Appendix 1* (no page number). **Documents and Publications - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

76. Caring Safely for Others; *Pastoral Standards and Safe Conduct in Ministry* (2020) **Documents and Publications - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** p.8.

77. See the Appendix for examples.

78. Catholic bishops are required to present a report on their dioceses to the Holy See every five years and to visit Rome to meet the Pope and the officials in various departments or dicasteries. Normally the bishops of England and Wales make this visit together.

79. In their comprehensive report on governance and management in the Church, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, the Australian bishops make this point, but also note indications that the practice may be changing. Available at **The+Light+from+the+Southern+Cross+FINAL+(15+August+2020).pdf** (squarespace.com) See p.64.

80. James F. Keenan, in 'Hierarchicalism' in *Theological Studies* 83.1 (2022) 84-108, cites a canon lawyer, John Beal, to validate this point. See p.101.

81. Elliott *Review*, p.14.

82. Elliott *Review*, p.14.

83. *Code of Canon Law*, available at Code of **Canon Law: Table of Contents (vatican.va)** See canons 381,391

84. The Motu Proprio was confirmed, extended and made permanent in 2023.

85. James F. Keenan, 'Hierarchicalism', p.99. The pontifical secret is a rule of confidentiality which binds some office-holders in the Catholic hierarchy to secrecy on certain matters such as the appointment of bishops. It has been controversial as it has also covered penal processes for cases of sexual abuse. In 2019, Pope Francis decreed that the pontifical secret should no longer apply in cases of clerical sexual abuse. See **Pope Francis lifts pontifical secret from legal proceedings of abuse trials of clerics | Catholic News Agency** The text of the decree is here **RESCRIPTUM EX AUDIENTIA SS.MI: Rescriptum of the Holy Father Francis to promulgate the Instruction on the confidentiality of legal proceedings (vatican.va)**

86. The Chairman of the Bishops' Conference is elected by the Conference and does not have power to compel any other bishop to take any particular action other than by persuasion and influence. The Bishops' Conference as a body can make binding decisions which apply to all its members only in certain specific areas defined in canon law.

87. **Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (vatican.va)** para 6. The sources cited in the extract are found in the online text but not repeated here.

88. Translated by Sr.Sergia Englund OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) p.91.

89. **Synod: Fr Ormond Rush's theological reflection on Synthesis Report - Vatican News** The sources cited in the text are found in the online text but not repeated here.

90. *Lumen Gentium*, para 56.

91. *Synod Preparatory Document,* para 2.

92. **https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-24/about.html**

93. Elliott *Report*, pp 6-8.

94. Elliott *Report*, p.6.

95. Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984) **Reconciliatio et Paenitentia (December 2, 1984) | John Paul II (vatican.va)** para 16.

96. Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint (1995) **Ut Unum Sint (25 May 1995) | John Paul II (vatican.va)** para. 34.

97. Lumen Gentium, para. 8, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 827 **Catechism of the Catholic Church (vatican.va)**

98. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* para. 827.

99. Francis Sullivan, 'Do the sins of its members affect the holiness of the Church.' in Michael S Attridge and Jarolsav Z. Skira (eds.) In God's Hands (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006). Sullivan points out that traditional answers to the question about whether the holiness of the Church is affected by the sins of its members are unsatisfactory. He quotes Karl Rahner's critical response to the idea that even when its members sin, the Church herself remains holy; 'The Church … is somehow, without its being noticed, "hypostatised", she becomes almost like an independent existent "entity" which stands as teacher and guide over against the people of God; she does not appear to be this people of God itself… in its actual state of pilgrimage'. p.267

100. Sullivan p.268.

101. See Chapter Four, 'Human Dignity and the Question of Social and Structural Sin' in Anna Rowlands, Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times (London: T and T Clark, 2021) especially p.106.

102. Fratelli tutti, **Fratelli tutti (3 October 2020) | Francis (vatican.va)** para. 215.

103. James Keenan, 'Vulnerability and Hierarchicalism' in *Melita Theologica, Journal of the Faculty of Theology, University of Malta,* 68/2 (2018) 129-142. p.137.

104. *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 69.

105. *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 67.

106. **Christifideles Laici (December 30, 1988) | John Paul II (vatican.va)**

107. *Evangelii Gaudium,* para. 102.

108. *Code of Canon Law*, **Code of Canon Law: Table of Contents (vatican.va)** canon 536.

109. *Lumen Gentium*, para. 28.

110. Austin Flannery OP (ed.) Vatican Council II: T*he Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975) p.361.

111. Excerpt from the English translation of *Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests and of Deacons* © 2018, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All Rights Reserved. The inclusion of the phrase about forming a priestly people is new in the revised 2018 edition; it was not in the previous edition. The new edition is due to be published in 2024.

112. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV) **Pastores Dabo Vobis (March 15, 1992) | John Paul II (vatican.va)** para. 12.

113. PDV, para. 15.

114. PDV, paras.15,16.

115. CCC. para. 1548, citing other teaching texts.

116. PDV, para 14.

117. PDV, para 17.

118. Keenan, *Hierarchicalism*, p.95

119. See Chapter One for an explanation of Vos estis lux mundi.

120. Enda McDonagh, *Vulnerable to the Holy* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004) p.32

121. See, for example, Bishop John Arnold's homily on the occasion of 40 years of priesthood; **Bishop John Arnold reflects on 40 years of priesthood | ICN (indcatholicnews.com)** or **Bishop Stephen Wright Installed as Fifteenth Bishop of Hexham Newcastle - Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle (diocesehn.org.uk)**

122. Massimo Faggioli, 'Apparent Victory, Actual Defeat? Vatican II Ecclesiology of Episcopacy' in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 26:1-2, (2019), pp. 51-61.

123. Faggioli, p.58.

124. Faggioli, pp.57-8.

125. Faggioli, p.61.

126. Walter Kasper, 'Amt und Gemeinde', originally published in Walter Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte*, (Mainz: M. Grünewald, 1970), 388-414. Reprinted in Walter Kasper, Die Kirche und ihre Ämter: Shriften zur Ekklesiologie II, (Freiburg: Herder, 2009) pp. 38-68 (p.55). English translation by Adrian Brooks.

127. Richard R. Gaillardetz, 'A Church in Crisis: How did we get here? How do we move forward?' in Worship 93 (2019), 204-224.p. 210. Gaillardetz also makes a link between distinct clerical identity and theologies that might problematize it: 'This near obsession with a distinctive identity, one encountered among some clergy and seminarians, is often grounded in a problematic theology of Holy Orders. That theology assumes that ordination confers, in a quasi-magical fashion, ministerial competency the *ordinand* did not possess prior to ordination.' p. 209.

128. Matthew 22:37-40.

129. See Pope Benedict XVI, Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1995) para 336. **Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (vatican.va)**

130. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 276 para 1.

131. Cf. *Apostolorum Successores* §2, §33, §43 & §97; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §15, Pope St Paul VI, 1965; *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* §12, Congregation for Clergy, 2002; *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* §8, §38, §45, §47, §49, & §69, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998. Text quoted is from CSFO p.8

132. Archbishop Scicluna is a canon lawyer who held the role of Promotor of Justice in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican, where he has led work to reform how canon law dealt with child sexual abuse. He has also been asked by the Pope to investigate how the bishops have responded to abuse cases in certain regions. He is now the Archbishop of Malta and still plays a leading role in reforms related to abuse and mishandling. James Keenan reports this response to a lecture Keenan gave in Malta at Scicluna's request. See Keenan, Hierarchicalism, p.97

133. See John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* para. 55.

134. Appendix 1 (no page number given).

135. **Salving the Vast Wounds That Remain From the Abuse Crisis | Church Life Journal | University**

of Notre Dame July 07, 2023.

136. See Myriam Wijlens, 'Synodality implies accountability. Accountability requires a synodal church' in *Studia Canonica* 56/2 (2022) 413-439.

137. This is one of the practices adopted during some synodal listening processes. Rather than just assert that some matters cannot be discussed as Catholic teaching is developed at the level of the Pope and his offices in the Vatican, those gathering the outcomes of synodal listening have noted these contentious matters including when they disagree with current teaching and included them in what is fed into the wider Synod process.

138. **Statement on Safeguarding - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk) November 2020.**

139. See **Bishop Stephen Wright Installed 15th Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** and Patrick Hudson, **Abuse survivors speak out at bishop's installation (thetablet.co.uk)** 20th July 2023.

140. See Christopher Lamb, '**Pope apologises to Comboni survivors' (thetablet.co.uk)** 13th June 2022.

141. At least sixteen diocesan reports prepared within the Synod process covered the impact of abuse on people's confidence in Church leaders and on the moral authority of the Church. They described a sense of immense damage as well as concern at the apparent lack of support for survivors and the lack of sorrow and humility in response. See also the National Synthesis for England and Wales **For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** p.12 paras 31,32.

142. Janine Geske, 'Restorative Justice and the Sexual Abuse Scandal in the Catholic Church' in *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol 8.2, (2007) 651-8.

143. Geske, pp. 654, 657.

144. **Truth Project | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

145. Kate Jackson-Meyer, 'A Clergy Abuse Truth and Reconciliation Commission' in *Doing Theology and Theological Ethics in the face of the Abuse Crisis*, eds. Daniel J. Fleming, James F. Keenan SJ and Hans Zollner SJ. (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications/Wipf, 2023) 230-246.

146. See also **A Proposal for a Clergy Abuse Truth and Reconciliation Commission Feasibility Study | Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (catholicethics.com)** 1st December 2023, where Jackson-Meyer develops this idea for the USA.

147. Catherine O'Connell and Barbara Walshe, A Restorative Response to the Abuse of Children Perpetrated by Joseph Marmion SJ **Restorative-Response-to-the Abuse-of-Children-Perpetrated by-Joseph-Marmion-SJ-August-2023.pdf (jesuit.ie)** p.7.

148. *Salving the Vast Wounds that Remain.*

149. O'Connell and Walshe, p.98.

150. O'Connell and Walshe, p.58 and p. 96.

151. **The Isaiah Journey - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)**

152. **Healing-Garden.pdf (cbcew.org.uk)** Guidelines for setting up other gardens are included.

153. *Vade Mecum for the Synod on Synodality*, **Vademecum-EN-A4.pdf (synod.va)** Appendix B, p.3.

154. *National Synthesis*, **National Synthesis - Catholic Bishops' Conference (cbcew.org.uk)** p.7.

155. *National Synthesis*, p.7.

156. **See Survivors Voices**

157. There is an interesting example of lament in the Pastoral Plan which emerged from the Synod in the Archdiocese of Liverpool;see p.12 headed 'Signposts to the future: The Lament'. **Synodality- Together on the road (liverpoolcathOlic.org.uk)**

158. (New York: Orbis Books, 2016) p. 89. References following are from the same text.

159. The School for Synodality is working on this. See **School for Synodality**

160. Rafael Luciani described this practice in an online seminar organised by The Tablet on synodality and accountability on 13th September.2023. Luciani described how bishops in Latin America agreed to implement the pastoral vision which emerged in their meetings in CELAM, the continental gathering of bishops for Latin America and the Caribbean, even though CELAM had no canonical status. He also described a practice whereby bishops might make known their willingness to step down if their pastoral councils, after due process and when these structures at both parish and diocesan level are mature, think this is needed.

161. **Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People | USCCB** The Statement of Episcopal Commitment is included in the Charter booklet.

162. Wijlens, p.439.

163. Wijlens, p.438.

164. **mn.catholic.org.au/people/clergy-and-parish-leaders-professional-support/**

165. **June 2022 Implementation Working Group Update - Archdiocese of Vancouver (rcav.org)**

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