



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO ABUSE: A FRESH APPROACH

Allegations of sexual abuse continue to be levied against religious organisations of all denominations. While the response from these organisations has been uniform in its condemnation, there is also an acceptance of the need to take full responsibility and provide more definitive action to combat the this abhorrent and harmful behaviour.

The Catholic and Anglican Church for example, have in recent years taken significant steps forward in adapting their internal safeguarding processes and structures, with greater emphasis in listening to the experiences of survivors and assisting them with their recovery.

However, the ability of religious organisations to rebuild the trust of survivors and public at large, is no easy task given the recent reports published by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and related media coverage.

This has left an indelible impression on the public that the historic culture and practices of these organisations is one where, according to a recent IICSA report:

i) sex offenders were able to hide and where alleged perpetrators were treated more supportively than victims;

ii) excessive attention was often paid to the circumstances of the alleged perpetrator in comparison to the attention given to those who disclosed they had been sexually abused or been placed at risk;

iii) the main overriding focus has been the desire to protect the reputation of the organisation over and above the protection and wellbeing of children and other vulnerable individuals;

iv) allegations of abuse against clerics and other members have routinely been ignored, minimalised or even dismissed by religious leaders, allowing alleged abusers to continue committing their abhorrent crimes.

IICSA has to date amongst others, made numerous recommendations as to how these barriers can at least start to be overcome including:

- Increasing safeguarding officers' power;
- Stripping senior clerical figures of their operational responsibility to investigate allegations;



- Improvements in the way safeguarding complaints are responded to and dealt with including the introduction of more structured mandatory codes of practice;
- Introducing more stringent and transparent punishments for failing to follow these codes of practice;
- Providing the required training for those handling complaints and allegations;
- Open information sharing between churches, particularly regarding clergy who move between churches, denominations or parishes;
- Greater support for victims and survivors; and
- Independent external auditing of safeguarding policies and procedures and more transparent publication of the results of these audits.

OUR SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

As a highly specialist safeguarding consultancy dedicated to helping religious orders ensure the children, vulnerable and other 'at risk' groups in their care can enjoy their lives safe from harm, abuse, and neglect we believe there is an opportunity to go one stage further.

Using our direct experience of working with a broad range of religious organisations to redress allegations of sexual abuse we have designed a unique 7-step model which from experience will not only tackle and conclude cases of sexual abuse in the way the victim deserves, but also allows religious organisations to implement a more robust safeguarding culture that will protect vulnerable members of society much more effectively and provide a better system of monitoring, learning and evaluation moving forward.

OUR OBJECTIVES: JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION AND REDRESS

The only way to regain the trust of survivors and the public as a whole is to ensure that the process and outcome of redress for survivors is fair, transparent and that it provides effective accountability. Otherwise, from our international experience of designing and implementing faith based redress schemes, the system of redress will lack credibility, trust and respect.

The move to a new culture under our 7-step model would also play a vital role in this process.

It enables religious organisations to better understand and engage with survivors, provides equality, understanding and respect, with the power to better resolve claims of abuse against clerics or other members of an organisation in an open, fair, transparent way that genuinely assists survivors with their process of healing.

It's also important to note our 7-step model involves a different non-adversarial approach to the current litigation of civil claims in the Civil Courts.

It has been specifically designed to be compassionate and victim focused and to enable survivors to participate; it is able to distinguish legitimate from non-legitimate claimants at an early stage.

If you are a religious organisation with an established presence in the UK and internationally, our model has also been designed to help you implement Goal 16 of the UN's Social Development Goals (which includes the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

Our model encourages survivors to come forward and provides access to free assistance at the point of contact.

There are, however, several additional benefits to adopting our 7-step model:-

- genuine survivors can be identified and treated much more compassionately, inclusively, fairly and swiftly, enabling them to secure justice within a short timescale.
- It will reduce the vast legal costs associated with the current civil claims procedures and ensure that funds instead are properly targeted in providing redress to survivors (including the provision of mental health/medical care where appropriate).
- It will provide total financial responsibility for any awards of damages that this new entity may make against any member of an organisation, including the costs of any ongoing care deemed necessary for the purpose of redress.
- It will give your those responsible for internal safeguarding decisions greater and direction as to the appropriate care and pastoral support to be given to the survivors and/or any other affected persons.
- It is a sustainable model with, integral learning, evaluation and monitoring, designed to create a legacy for change.

IF YOUR ORGANISATION WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR
UNIQUE 7-STEP MODEL, PLEASE CONTACT DOMINIK OPALIŃSKI AT
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