

THE BISHOP OF ROCHESTER

The Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs

Bishopscourt, 24 St Margaret's Street, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1TS

tel 01634 842721 email bishopscourt@rochester.anglican.org

To: All Clergy and Lay Ministers
Diocesan Staff
Parish Safeguarding Officers
Children & Young People Workers
Churchwardens and PCC Secretaries

13 November 2024

My dear sisters and brothers,

Over recent days I have been shocked and appalled, as I am sure have many of you, to read the findings of the Makin Review. Thorough and detailed work in the report has brought into the light the full extent of the horrendous abuse perpetrated by John Smyth, as well as the failure by so many to stop his abhorrent crimes, allowing further abuse to take place, particularly in Africa. My thoughts and prayers are with all the victims and survivors who so bravely came forward and who have been so badly let down, and with their families, friends, and those who have supported them and spoken on their behalf.

The Makin report revealed a systemic failure in the response of the Church of England to the disclosure of the abuse of John Smyth. I therefore believe that Archbishop Justin has taken the difficult but right and honourable decision to take responsibility for not only his own personal failings in this matter, but also those of the institution he leads, and I pray for him and his family at this time.

This is I believe a watershed moment in the life of the Church of England, in which we can send a strong signal that we must and will put victims and survivors first. It is an opportunity for us to commit afresh to creating a safe and healthy culture across the national church and within our own diocese; to being the kind of Church that truly reflects God's righteousness, justice, and peace. A Church where people feel safe and supported to speak out when something does not seem right; a Church where those in leadership always act for the sake of truth and justice, not for reputation; a Church where all can flourish and enjoy life in all its fulness as God intends. Indeed, as we approach Safeguarding Sunday this weekend, I would encourage you to share the message more strongly than ever that we all have a part to play in keeping each other safe – please use this letter directly with your congregations if helpful.

There will be time in the days ahead to reflect on all that has happened, to work together with victims and survivors to implement the recommendations of the Makin Report, and to reflect upon the ministry of Archbishop Justin.

For now, may I encourage you to keep everyone involved in your prayers, seeking God's healing and compassion for all those affected in whatever way.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised by the review, may I also urge you to seek support from any of the agencies listed below.

With my love and prayers,

Jonathan, Bishop of Rochester

Finding support

If you or anyone you are in contact with are affected by the publication of the Makin Report and want to talk to someone independently, please call the Safe Spaces helpline on 0300 303 1056 or visit safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the diocesan safeguarding team or the National Safeguarding Team at safeguarding@churchofengland.org

There are also other support services available.