

MACSAS

Minister & Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors

Press Release

Tuesday 2nd March 2010

MACSAS comments on the Church of England's completed independent child protection survey across dioceses and calls for an open and transparent inquiry into Child Abuse within the Church of England

View the original Church of England press release at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr2610.html>

MACSAS is glad that the child protection survey has been completed. We feel that the survey is long overdue.

MACSAS would like to see the results of the survey published in detail, rather than a brief summary of findings. We note that the Revd Anthony Priddis, Chair of the Church's central Safeguarding Liaison Group said that the Church could not give guarantees 'that allegations which were not recorded in the past will not resurface in the future'. There must be a suspicion then, that some information was not written down and we would like to know why the recording system used in the past was so inadequate. What has been reviewed is written evidence but there could be many more stories to be told.

The suffering of the victims of clergy abuse in the Church of England over the 30 year period covered by the report is not mentioned, and no apology has been offered.

Although 13 'cases' were identified from the files, each of these represents not just one victim, but several in some cases, and many in others. A recent court case in Bradford resulted in the jailing of a minister who had sexually abused more than 40 victims. MACSAS chair, Anne Lawrence said:

"This review should not just be a headcount of current perpetrators who were working within the Church, but an acknowledgement of the lifelong suffering that each abuser has caused to the victims. The Church should take responsibility for the actions of its ministers, recognise the needs of survivors and where appropriate compensation should be forthcoming."

Questions MACSAS would like answered regarding the true number of child abusers identified

The Church of England press statement tells us that following the past cases review no minister or Church worker deemed to have harmed a child, and for whom a report was found, now works in the Church, and that all those individuals identified were referred to the police, outside assessment agencies, or were internally disciplined where no other action was deemed appropriate. MACSAS wants to know what this means and in particular asks:

- How many alleged abusers were identified and how many allegations of child abuse were identified?
- How many alleged abusers identified are now dead?

- How many alleged abusers identified were deemed to be too ill to require further investigate or action e.g. through dementia, old age or terminal illness?
- How many alleged abusers identified have left the jurisdiction or control of the Church of England and were therefore deemed to be beyond the remit of the report from the past case review e.g. those who fled or were sent to America, Australia, Africa and elsewhere, and those who have left the Church?
- MACSAS knows of one Anglican priest who was alleged to have abused boys at a private school in Birmingham. He then went to Australia where he is alleged to have abused children in Adelaide whilst still in ministry. He eventually fled Australia when an inquiry was begun and was subsequently murdered last year in Libya. MACSAS would like to know if he was among the number included in the press release?

MACSAS believes that the press release from the Church of England reveals merely the tip of the iceberg.

Why this matters

The reasons it matters and the reason the Church and the public should count, record and be mindful of the number of alleged abusers identified and the number of allegations made against each abuser is three fold:

- (i) The public have a right to know whether Bishops sat on files of ministers and Church workers with allegations of child sexual abuse and did nothing to protect other children from harm, by for instance reporting them to the police prior to this review?

From the cases now disclosed in the press release it is clear that some Dioceses had files containing allegations of child abuse which were uncovered during the past cases review. How long had the Bishops in these dioceses known about these dangerous individuals and how many more victims were abused because the Bishops did nothing or covered up the allegations?

In the Bradford case concerning Peter Hedge, allegations of child sexual abuse ranged back over more than a decade and police had previously investigated. We know that because of the lack of any evidence from that first investigation no further action was taken against Hedge and he went on to abuse dozens more children before eventually he was handed over to the police as part of this review process.

If Bishops did sit on allegations, and thereby caused further abuse to take place or caused victims to suffer unnecessarily because of a lack of due process which would have brought them support, redress and justice, there needs to be a public inquiry as that would be truly scandalous, just as scandalous as the findings in the Dublin Inquiry.

- (ii) Until all allegations and all alleged abusers are identified, and all files for those cases are opened up to independent scrutiny, even were the person is dead, the victims can obtain no redress, support or justice, no apology, no healing.

As it is, not only will those victims where the abuser is not considered to be in a position to harm any further, get no redress, neither will those whose abusers have been identified through this process unless outside agencies have been involved and victims contacted or otherwise enabled to come forward through some open and transparent process.

The Church has no policy in place to offer support or redress to the victims even where the alleged abuser has now been prosecuted. What support and redress has been offered to the victims of Fr Hedge?

- (iii) Many victims do not report child abuse either at the time or as adults. The shame, the distress, the harm caused is so great, as is the likelihood of re-traumatisation caused by inappropriate and ill considered investigation processes. Until the Church can demonstrate that it is able to listen to the victims and offer appropriate responses including support and redress, victims will remain hidden and abusers will continue to abuse children within the Church.

Call for a Public Inquiry

MACSAS calls for an open and transparent inquiry into Child Abuse within the Church of England which will allow victims/survivors to tell their stories and be heard, and which will shatter the complacency of the Church authorities, so clearly illustrated in the press release issued last week. Until that happens victims will continue to suffer in silence and isolation and the Church will continue to fail to accept responsibility for the harm caused, or offer support and redress which can bring closure for those who have suffered too long already.

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