



# SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

URC NORTHERN SYNOD

DEC 2018

## **WELCOME to the Newsletter for Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk**

As we approach one of the busiest and most joyful time of the year, I hope you will be able to find a few minutes to look at this December Safeguarding newsletter. Although Christmas is a joyful celebration, it can also be a difficult time for many, with increased financial strain and relationship tensions. For example, domestic abuse is often more prevalent at this time of year. So do continue to be vigilant in safeguarding those in your churches, remembering that in addition to support from Church Safeguarding Officers and myself, excellent safeguarding advice can be accessed free of charge from CCPAS (now called Thirtyone:eight). Their 24-hour helpline for churches is open 7 days a week on **0303 003 11**.

I pray that you will all have a joyful and peaceful Christmas in your churches and with family and friends.



## **United Reformed Church Past Case Review**

The United Reformed Church has undertaken a wide-ranging review of its safeguarding work since the Church was founded in 1972. This review took more than two years. It included careful scrutiny of records and an invitation for people to contact the Church and report concerns. A major and independently-authored report then followed, with key points of learning and recommendations about what the Church can do to continue and improve its culture of safeguarding. The full report can be accessed via the following link: <https://urc.org.uk/news/2908-united-reformed-church-offers-heartfelt-apology-to-survivors-of-abuse>

A programme of work is being led by the national Safeguarding Advisory Group in the URC to address the recommendations in this report. Central to this work is the updating of the safeguarding Good Practice Guidelines and the development of a consistent URC safeguarding training programme.

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## Safeguarding Training

*As part of the improvement work following the recommendations of the URC Past Case Review report, new nationally designed foundation and leadership training programmes are currently being developed for the URC, aiming to be available for use by Synods by autumn 2019. Prior to that we will continue to use the Methodist training materials and programmes.*

### Foundation training

An evening session is planned in the Peterlee area on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan. Please email [gsands.safeguardingurc@outlook.com](mailto:gsands.safeguardingurc@outlook.com) if you would like further details.

### Leadership training

Sokesley Methodist Church; 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 5.30pm to 10pm  
Marton Methodist Church; Sat 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 9am to 1.30pm  
A booking form is available via the link below.

As new courses become available, their details will be posted on the synod website here: <http://urc-northernynod.org/safeguarding/>

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE URC PCR REPORT.

The files from the PCR contain evidence of cases of sexual abuse and neglect of children, sexual abuse and inappropriate behaviour, domestic violence and abuse, financial abuse and spiritual abuse of adults and lack of awareness of vulnerability and mental health.

The review identified a need to develop policy, practice guidance, support and training across all forms of abuse but specifically around the issues of **domestic violence and abuse, spiritual abuse and financial abuse**. It is suggested that work with survivors must underpin this development. Establishing and maintaining boundaries and understanding mental health and vulnerability should also be part of this development work.

The review identified **confusion over what constitutes a safeguarding concern** and where the threshold is. There needs to be a clear definition and threshold for a safeguarding concern and standardised mandatory safeguarding training for those working with children, young people and adults at risk of harm. Survivor consultation in the development of training is essential.

There seems some **disconnection between safeguarding and disciplinary processes**. It is suggested that a new disciplinary process be developed, which prioritises safeguarding. As part of this mandated groups should be reviewed to ensure appropriate selection and training and the opportunity to build experience of cases.

There were many issues related to **documentation, process and response**. The quality and standardisation of record keeping was generally poor. There is evidence of inappropriate response, lack of action following disclosure and failures to refer to statutory agencies or to identify or monitor appropriate follow-up action.

A **standardised record keeping system is required**, with universal templates. The learning group recommends that the URC should move towards a centralised electronic records system over the next five years. Record keeping must include decisions made, actions required and identify the individual responsible for ensuring these have been undertaken. It must also include records of support offered and taken by victims. Additionally, more effective referral processes are required with greater relationship with statutory agencies.

Overall the URC should focus on **developing a safeguarding culture** where theology, teaching policy, practice guidance and training underpin a discourse of preventing abuse and effective response and support for victims. Consideration should be given to safeguarding transcending synod structures such that it can be standardised and centralised

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### *Apology made by Revd John Proctor, 23rd Nov 2018*

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On behalf of General Assembly, the Church's key decision-making body, the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, made the following apology:

**'The United Reformed Church offers a heartfelt apology to survivors of abuse and to their families, supporters and communities.**

**'We acknowledge the past failures of the United Reformed Church and the courage of survivors, some of whom disclosed exceptionally difficult, life-changing, experiences of abuse as part of the past case review. Any harm and abuse inflicted by people we trusted is, and will remain, a deep source of grief and shame to the Church.**

**'The Church calls on anyone who serves our congregations, synods, institutions and offices to continue taking significant steps to support and protect children, young people and adults from suffering and experiencing any form of abuse.'**

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## DBS Checks

In the last newsletter I gave you the link to the Due Diligence URC microsite and the Due Diligence contact number to use regarding any DBS check technical queries. I sense that you may be using that contact number as I have received fewer enquiries about DBS check in the last month or so.

There is just one thing that I wanted to provide an update on here. It concerns the issue of 'portability' of DBS checks. The ability to pay extra to 'take your DBS check' from one role to the next has been part of the Government's agenda. Many people who volunteer for the URC in a role requiring a DBS check, who are checked in their paid substantive role, such as for example, as a teacher, have asked if they can use the 'portability facility'. However, because this would require use of a check carried out in another organisation, Due Diligence is not currently happy to do this. It requires them to have complete confidence in the integrity of the DBS checking process of another, potentially unknown organisation. I will keep you updated if there is any progress with this.



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That's all for now!

Thank you all for working so hard on this important agenda and have a very Happy Christmas,

Synod Safeguarding Advisor

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## SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS:

Any safeguarding concerns, referrals that have been made to our statutory partners (e.g. police, social services) and any allegations of crimes that have been committed, must be brought to the attention of the Synod Safeguarding Advisor.

WHO DO I CONTACT:

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I am available during my working hours to provide advice regarding safeguarding concerns.

At other times, free advice can be sought from CCPAS 24-hour helpline. This organisation has recently changed its name to thirtyone:eight.

Thirtyone:eight helpline number:

Tel: 0303 003 1111