



---

THE  
ARCHBISHOP  
OF YORK

---

Bishopthorpe Palace  
Bishopthorpe  
York  
YO23 2GE

Tel: 01904 707021  
[www.archbishopofyork.org](http://www.archbishopofyork.org)

21 October 2020

## Open letter

I write regarding the publication on 22 October of Judge David Pearl's independent report, entitled, 'A Betrayal of Trust', to offer my profound apologies, as Archbishop of York, on behalf of the Church of England, to all those who were abused by Victor Whitsey, Bishop of Chester 1974-1981. I also wish to apologise to any who reported abuse without proper action being taken by the Church. I say to survivors, what you endured as a young person as a result of the criminal behaviour of Whitsey, a leading member of the clergy in his day, is a matter of deep shame for the church. That shame is accentuated today by the analysis provided by this report, which shows our many failings in the way in which complaints were – or – in some cases – were not responded to by church officials, including by senior clergy.

Where I have been given the names and addresses of survivors, I am sending individual apology letters, but I am equally conscious there are others who have understandably not wanted direct contact with the Church but who have given evidence to the Independent Review. I also have in mind any survivors who may not have come forward. To all of you I say, both for myself and on behalf of the Church of England, I am profoundly sorry both for the abuse and harm inflicted by Bishop Whitsey, and for the further hurt caused by the Church's safeguarding failings, first in not protecting you when it happened, and second in not taking proper action where abuse was disclosed.

I realise that an apology can only go so far to address painful memories. I want you to know that the Archbishop of Canterbury and I, along with the House of Bishops, and the National Safeguarding Team, are determined to ensure that lessons learned today are acted upon to ensure the Church of England is a safer church and a church both better ready to hear, and better equipped to respond, wherever abuse is reported. The publication of the IICSA report on 6 October has given us clear guidance as to many of the issues still to be addressed, and 'A Betrayal of Trust' makes further recommendations for improving safeguarding and responding in future. We are committed to this, and are ready to be held to account for further reform and improvements to our safeguarding policy and practice.

I realise that the publication of the report today may well stir up difficult emotions for some, and I am sorry for this also. If you would like support, or someone independent to discuss this with, the Safe Spaces helpline for survivors and victims of Church-related abuse will be available to you and can be contacted on 0300 303 1056 (answerphone available outside of opening times), [safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk), or you can go to their website at [www.SafeSpacesEnglandandWales.org.uk](http://www.SafeSpacesEnglandandWales.org.uk). This service is commissioned by the Church of England and Catholic Church jointly but is run by Victim Support and is fully independent of either Church. Alternatively, you can contact MACSAS, Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors, on freeline 08088 010340, Saturdays 9.00am-11.30am and Wednesdays 7.00pm-9.30pm, or go to their website at [www.macsas.org.uk](http://www.macsas.org.uk). This is also entirely independent of the Church of England.

In the meantime do please get in touch with me if you wish – I would be grateful to hear from you. Either I or one of my colleagues, or a member of the National Safeguarding Team, are ready to hear anything you might like to say. Do get in touch, via the above address or [office@archbishopofyork.org](mailto:office@archbishopofyork.org).

If it is your custom, please pray for me and for the Church, as I pray for you. And may God bless all those striving for a safer church today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Stephen Cottrell :'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen Cottrell  
Archbishop of York