



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 6/7 JULY 2019**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ – my dear friends,

Let your first words be, “Peace to this house”.

A few days ago we received the wonderful news that we had all been waiting for – Blessed John Henry Newman is to be canonized by Pope Francis on Sunday 13 October in Rome. For me it brought back the happiest memories of our great gathering with Pope Benedict XVI in Cofton Park for Cardinal Newman’s beatification in 2010. Now we have a new saint for the Archdiocese, following in the footsteps of St Chad and all our martyr saints.

This uplifting news came only a few days after the publication of the IICSA Report into safeguarding within our local Church. When I last wrote to you about this in November IICSA’s public hearings were about to begin. Now the report is publically available. It sets out in shocking detail some of the terrible abuse suffered by young people at the hands of those from whom they had every right to expect only compassion and pastoral care.

As we contemplate and celebrate the memory of a saintly priest in the life and ministry of Blessed Cardinal Newman, it is painful to acknowledge the criminal failings of those who abandoned the solemn promises of their ordination to abuse children under the cloak of religion. It is still hard to comprehend how such things could have come about and we have learnt much from the independent review of past cases which the diocesan trustees commissioned in preparation for IICSA from Mrs Jan Pickles, a nationally recognised expert in safeguarding.

At the heart of IICSA’s findings lies the betrayal of trust, which is the basis for a priest’s relationship with his parishioners, together with responses to allegations of abuse that failed to put the welfare of children first. I am very grateful that the trust between priests and people, while undoubtedly damaged, has survived, despite the scandal of abuse - but I bitterly regret the lasting damage that has clearly been done to victims and survivors in our Archdiocese.

Today our responses to allegations of abuse differ radically from the past. IICSA has acknowledged that *priests and other clergy who face such allegations are now placed on administrative leave and procedures put in place to ensure that children are protected*. This has been the case for many years now, and in its review of allegations since 2001 (a date chosen by the Inquiry) IICSA found that the Archdiocese had referred all allegations to the statutory authorities. We will continue to do so without fail.

For me, one of the humbling and unexpected graces to come from IICSA has been the opportunity to meet with more people who suffered terrible crimes as children. With the support of our safeguarding team I have met with six victim-survivors to listen to their life stories and to ask their forgiveness on behalf of the Church, I have been profoundly moved by their dignity and courage. They have convinced me that we can only improve our safeguarding and our pastoral response to victim-survivors by listening with humility and learning from their experience.

Over the coming month I shall be meeting with a further six victim-survivors. I would ask you, please, to pray especially for them and for their families – and that our meetings may bring them some comfort and peace of mind.

The IICSA report has also highlighted some of the weaknesses within our current safeguarding arrangements that were detected last year by the independent audit commissioned by the Archdiocese from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and in the Pickles report. When I wrote to you in November I said: *These two reports have highlighted serious past failures and current areas requiring significant improvement in diocesan practice and we are acting promptly to put their recommendations into action*. Both of these reports were disclosed to IICSA and shared with other dioceses, as well as with our national safeguarding structures, so that everyone could benefit from them.

The diocesan trustees have taken a number of important steps since last November to remedy the deficiencies discovered. We have appointed a Head of Safeguarding Transformation to oversee the necessary improvements and we have increased the safeguarding team's resources. We have recruited a new Safeguarding Co-ordinator and appointed a Lead Trustee for safeguarding. We have arranged for Barnado's to provide professional supervision of our lead employees. Where necessary, paperwork has been revisited and corrected, with all appropriate further actions taken. As I said at the IICSA hearing: *while work was done, it has to be shown to have been done for us to know*. We aim to improve all areas of safeguarding training for clergy and parish representatives and so support the culture of safeguarding across our parishes and chaplaincies.

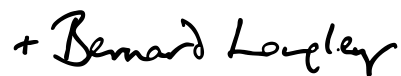
Please forgive me for entering into such detail here, but I feel it is important for you to know how the Archdiocese has been responding to the findings of IICSA. The report concludes that we *must professionalise both the way the safeguarding team operates and the way the team is managed and overseen* and that change must be led by myself and the Safeguarding Commission. We have been responding to that urgent necessity since last November and we will continue to do so.

Just after the publication of the IICSA report I received a letter from one of our diocesan priests, in which he wrote: *In the worldwide Church, and particularly in this Diocese at the present moment there is now a necessary work to be done – to plead for and receive forgiveness, to encourage and work for reconciliation....in the hopes expressed now so many times that such terrible things must never be repeated – the Eucharist offers us new energy, new hope*.

This letter reminded me of the beautiful motto of Blessed Cardinal Newman *Cor ad cor loquitur – Heart speaks to heart*. I would like all those who have suffered abuse to know that they are always welcome to speak with me and that my door remains open for whenever they may wish to contact me.

Please pray with me for all those who have suffered abuse in our Archdiocese, that we may learn from their courageous example about the depths of God's love. And pray also that we may become more and more a Church where children and vulnerable people experience the compassionate love of Jesus Christ.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard Longley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 4 July 2019 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on 6/7 July 2019