

Survivors say Church hierarchy failing to lead on child abuse

Posted: Thu, 7th Dec 2017

Survivors and campaigners have accused the Archbishop of Canterbury of being "evasive" and failing to offer "clear leadership" over child abuse.

In an exchange of letters with Gilo, who was sexually assaulted by a reverend in the 1970s and now campaigns for a change in Church culture, Justin Welby declined to commit to accepting mandatory reporting requirements. These would mean Church officials who had reasonable grounds for suspecting child abuse and failed to inform the authorities would be breaking the law.

"As you know, we are now in the middle of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse," he wrote. "I am keen to hear its views and wisdom on the subject of mandatory reporting — which is not as straightforward an issue as is sometimes suggested."

He also said the Bishop at Lambeth would take up the "complex issue" of reopening past settlements from the C of E's insurer, Ecclesiastical.

Gilo said Mr Welby's latest letter was "evasive" and inadequate.

"Stating in vaguest of terms the complexity of an issue does not address complexities," he said. "There doesn't seem any ownership of the crisis, nor recognition that questions such as these need facing at archbishop level, and the clear call of leadership required to shift the Church into structural and cultural change and towards authentic justice."

Mr Welby and Gilo have exchanged letters since October, when the Archbishop publicly apologised for failing to respond to 17 previous letters.

And in a series of responses Gilo has gathered and [made public](#) this week, other campaigners including NSS vice-president Richard Scorer supported the call for mandatory reporting.

Mr Scorer, who also belongs to the Association of Child Abuse Lawyers, said: "The Archbishop could do much better than this. He should use his position and wider influence to insist on real change in two key respects.

"First, mandatory reporting, so that those who might otherwise be tempted to collude in the cover-up of abuse know that they have no option but to report it. Second, fair and just reparation for survivors, as part of a wider restorative process, so that the true extent of the harm caused by abuse is properly acknowledged.

"Given the extent of the abuse scandal now revealed in the C of E, the Archbishop owes survivors nothing less."

Baroness Walmsley, who in 2014 tabled the ongoing Government inquiry Reporting and Acting on Child Abuse, said it was a "very simple matter". "If you know or suspect that a child is being abused, or has been abused, you must report the matter to the correct authorities. To fail to do so is to collude with the perpetrator."

Simon Barrow, the Director of the think tank Ekklesia, said the Archbishop's "emollient" response had highlighted "a profound danger: a Church previously in active denial over abuse has now learned to mask institutional damage limitation with polite concern".

Dr Julie Macfarlane, a law professor in Canada and an abuse survivor, said there was "no excuse" for the Anglican Church to refuse to adopt mandatory reporting before the inquiry "almost certainly" required it.

The National Secular Society has [called for](#) mandatory reporting of child abuse and [criticised](#) the Church's links with Ecclesiastical.

This week the C of E also faced pressure from within to change its approach to the issue. The Dean of St Paul's, Very Rev Dr David Ison, said the Church should set up structures for safeguarding and discipline independent of the bishops. Writing in [Christian Today](#), he said the bishops' ministry was "compromised" because they had to administer both pastoral care and discipline.

[Discuss this on Facebook.](#)

While you're here

Our news and opinion content is an important part of our campaigns work. Many articles involve a lot of research by our campaigns team. If you value this output, please consider supporting us today.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Abuse](#), [Disestablishment](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[End abuse in religious settings](#)

Religious privilege must not undermine safeguarding and justice.

[Read More](#)

-

Disestablish the Church of England

A state religion has no place in a 21st century democracy.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

Report: CofE safeguarding “below standards” of secular institutions

Most victims and survivors unsatisfied with safeguarding approaches, while safeguarding 'weaponised' to remove those "seen as a nuisance", report finds. [Read More »](#)

Review: CofE leaders mainly to blame for sacking safeguarding body

"Extreme time pressure" imposed chiefly by archbishop of Canterbury caused "serious design flaws" in safeguarding board, review finds [Read More »](#)

CofE fails to back reporting of sex abuse disclosures in confession

Church admits confession is "a safe space" for child sexual abusers [Read More »](#)

The Church of England is legitimising spiritual abuse

The Exorcist director William Friedkin [died](#) at the age of 87 this week. His seminal film immortalised the concept... [Read More »](#)

NSS urges Charity Commission to investigate CofE safeguarding

NSS letter comes amid mounting criticism of the decision to sack the Independent Safeguarding Board [Read More »](#)