



# DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**Rt Rev Robert Byrne CO**  
**Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle**

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## Message to Diocesan Clergy on the occasion of Survivors & Victims of Abuse Prayer Day - May 17<sup>th</sup> 2022

The Holy Father has appointed today (Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May) as a day of prayer and reflection for victims and survivors of abuse. As Bishop, I will celebrate the midday Mass in our Cathedral and will pray for all victims who have suffered abuse at the hands of clergy within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. I would like to use this day to express my deepest sorrow and apologise unreservedly on behalf of the Church for what has happened in the past and pledge that we will work together to do better for survivors, victims and others affected.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has worked with 'The Isaiah Journey' working group, established because of the need to create a pastoral-spiritual response to the suffering of victims and survivors of abuse in the Church. The themes behind this response are inspired by the writings of the prophet Isaiah, that of seeking truth, bringing hope, and finding healing. The resources that have been made available, accessible through link below, have been written by or with survivors, and as such give a unique insight into the pastoral and spiritual needs to be addressed.

While a day such as today provides a focus for reflection and prayer, these resources can be used throughout the year. Indeed, it is hoped that these will be used in this way and combined with other efforts by the local church to support victims and survivors. Abuse in the Church also has a wider impact on families and friends of victims. Therefore, prayers and any possible practical support will be forthcoming for them also.

With the issue of safeguarding in mind at this time, I have also been reflecting on recent experiences where our current safeguarding practices have come under scrutiny, particularly the events leading up to and during the recent and widely reported Newcastle Coroner's Inquest. This event, and our own Trustee commissioned safeguarding review conducted following the death of Canon Michael McCoy, have confirmed that both our support to those involved and to the other agencies involved was as it should have been, and was undertaken in a thoroughly professional and sensitive manner by our safeguarding staff and others working on behalf of the Diocese.

As some may know, there has been some uninformed comment and speculation on the events of April 2021 and the period leading up to Canon McCoy's death and beyond. Regrettably this is being continued by a few, whose lack of knowledge of the facts is matched only by their lack of sensitivity to those involved.

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On behalf of Diocesan Trustees, I would like to take this opportunity to thank both past and present members of our Diocesan Safeguarding Department and those who support them - including those who act as Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs) as well as our expert members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee - for their diligent and dedicated work throughout this last year, and over these last years. They have together provided the Diocese with the firm foundations on which to build our further efforts to embed a safeguarding culture and practice in its widest forms and furthest reach. We all play a part in protecting the vulnerable. Deeper knowledge, as well as empathy - helped by a day of prayer such as today - is something which will benefit all who follow Christ's teachings.

I know I have the backing of the Diocesan Trustees in our wish to continue to play our full part in the important work of deepening Diocesan understanding of safeguarding. With that in mind, I would like to let you know of my intention to significantly increase the amount of safeguarding awareness raising and training with educational resources to be made available to you as local clergy, alongside the continuing support we offer to victims and survivors. Deeper listening and insight, as well as the sharing of learning on safeguarding will help us become a safer church community.

We welcome further ideas for how the Diocese should focus this increased resource, so as to get the most appropriate high level of impact and lasting outcomes that we can. As with the theme of the recent Synodal exercise, safeguarding is also a subject where we will journey, learn and live our faith as one Church - together.



✠ Robert Byrne CO  
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

Footnotes:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse-2022/>

If you need any support, please contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Department through Meriel Anderson on [meriel.anderson@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:meriel.anderson@diocesehn.org.uk)

