



Chapter Five

Resistance, hope and healing



1. Introduction: Perceptions of progress and tensions that continue

Although the voices speaking in this research were often filled with pain and sadness or were troubled and grieving, this was not the whole story. Among all the groups that spoke to us there were testimonies of resistance and courage and of compassionate response. There were stories of attitudes and actions that enable healing and growth for individuals and communities. This material was not as extensive as the narratives, perceptions and emotions detailing the impact of abuse and the experience of inadequate responses and mishandling, but it is still important. There were signs of hope and of a kind of maturing in understanding of what is asked of a faithful Christian community. There was also recognition among many participants that progress had been made in safeguarding practice, that Catholic communities and institutions are now almost always safer places. The overall picture that emerges is one of a Catholic community in which change is happening and understanding is growing; but with much yet to learn and to do. This change is also part of how the abuse crisis has had an impact on Catholic life, challenging habits and assumptions in a permanent way.

There was a consensus from many voices that safeguarding is now being taken seriously in most dioceses and religious orders. Systems are stronger, and the resources needed are in place, a diocesan officer said, and several safeguarding staff described elements of good practice they have been developing. The shift from diocesan safeguarding roles being held by priests to the appointment of professional qualified staff with backgrounds in fields such as social work and policing has been significant, although it has brought new complexities as incoming staff may have limited experience of Catholic life. This affirmation of progress was always accompanied by a recognition that becoming a safe and healthy church is a process which continues, with much more yet to be achieved. *'We can continue to get better'*, said one diocesan safeguarding officer. Another safeguarding professional described her perception:

I also think that, if you now go to a parish, we may not have got it totally right, but at a parish level, most people have got the word right, they've got something on a notice board, it's an awareness and if they see something wrong, they know who to take it to. Now that, I think, in the last, probably the last seven years, has been a massive step and a massive mind-set change, partly I think because so many things came out in the open, in the press. People now realise it is an issue, they could be looking for it and you need to be calling it out.

The change of mindset was also seen, for some, in how those in leadership positions are more able to admit failure and apologise, and to act swiftly when needed. For one survivor, this suggests a change of heart as well as mind is underway. Several voices also pointed to bishops' willingness to meet survivors and listen to them. People involved in safeguarding spoke of one case where a bishop travelled to another city to meet a survivor, and of a bishop who spent time with a survivor in her late 80s who needed to talk.

Changing the mind-set of the Church is a slow process. There are also areas where tensions are still experienced. Whilst the bishops who took part in this research were clearly committed to listening to their safeguarding advisers and accepting their advice, safeguarding staff in a different diocese described a relatively recent experience of feeling powerless to compel decisions that they think are needed from diocesan leaders or to ask challenging questions. The recent review of safeguarding in Hexham and Newcastle Diocese by the CSSA addressed this particular issue strongly, indicating that this may still be a concern but also demonstrating that the CSSA will act swiftly and communicate transparently when concerns arise.⁵⁶

There was also awareness of the risk of thinking the problem has now been solved, particularly as new policies are operating and new structures are in place following the Elliott Review. A young priest commented:

I think there's that need to grow in self-awareness and not to rest on our laurels. I think a lot of good work has been done... a lot of good has been achieved but that good potentially risks us becoming complacent and thinking, oh we've actually weeded this issue out, when you can't weed it out, it's endemic Though those of us at the younger end of the spectrum have always perceived this as something historic, within a particular culture and a particular historical context, and when it manifests in the present day ... that makes it all the more shocking.

Safeguarding at diocesan and local level is now using a standards-based approach, aimed at ensuring

The Elliott Review: Moving to a standards-based approach to safeguarding and to independent auditing.

The Elliott Review recommendations, published in September 2020, centred on measures to ensure that effective safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and that accountability is actively practised at all levels. The Review recommended the adoption of eight safeguarding standards against which all practice should be assessed. Compliance is then to be audited and reported on by an independent body. The recommendations also covered the responsibility of diocesan governance structures for ensuring good safeguarding practice. Each standard has a number of specific criteria which parishes, dioceses, religious communities and other Catholic groups and organisations can use to gather evidence to indicate progress in meeting the standard.

The Standards

1. Embed safeguarding in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry, and culture.
2. Communicate the Church's safeguarding message.
3. Engage with and care for those that report having been harmed.
4. Effectively manage allegations and concerns.
5. Manage and support subjects or allegations and concerns (respondents).
6. Implement robust human resource management.
7. Provide and access training and support for safeguarding.
8. Quality assure compliance to continuously improve practice.

that good practice is developed and continually improved. Some laypeople and some safeguarding staff in particular were aware that this approach brings new risks. A woman with experience of diocesan work explained:

you might inadvertently fall into a CQC, you know, 'requires improvement' or a sort of hygiene scores on the doors type of attitude, oh we've got five or we've got four, which become, you stick it on the bottom of your emails and it doesn't become something that's really part of who you are and that you're putting it into practice.

It was striking that several safeguarding professionals spoke about their commitment to a **'relational approach'** to their task or about finding an **'ethical way of working'**. The elements of such an approach were described: being willing to seek advice; writing everything in a way that survivors can see; writing reflective letters to survivors so that there are no surprises; checking the accuracy of any recordings; and building personal relationships with all the priests. One diocesan safeguarding officer described this as **'therapeutic'** for the staff as well. A survivor who had experienced serious mishandling also acknowledged that **'there are some good people'** in Catholic safeguarding work.

Alongside the reform of policies and structures, participants described other initiatives to reach victims and offer resources and access to support. A leader of a male religious order described a new helpline inviting victims of abuse in any of the order's institutions to come forward; a healing retreat programme, From Grief to Grace, has been working since 2011, assisted by the use of a house from a religious order.⁵⁷ At the national level, the Catholic Church, through the Bishops' Conference, and the Church of England, have set up *Safe Spaces*, an independent support agency for victims of abuse related to either Church.⁵⁸

2. A Gospel based approach

A further sign of hope was found in a desire expressed by many voices for a Gospel-centred response to the questions asked of the Church by the abuse crisis. This was seen as particularly important in relation to institutional response to victims and survivors. In Chapter Two, a heartfelt expression of this from a bishop is included (see p. 59). A safeguarding officer concurred:

If as Catholics, we don't start off with, with being compassionate, with reaching out, with wanting to protect people who are vulnerable, with ensuring that we call out injustice which is what this is, without that, there's no point in having a standards base.

A survivor expressed what this meant to him:

There's a bit in the Gospel that says, what father among you, if your son asked for bread, would hand him a snake? It's got to be a response that strips away the levels of power and allows survivors to actually confront the person who is their pastor.

A female leader of a religious community also spoke strongly about this:

It should be part of our guts that if somebody comes in, whether it's in a confessional or whether it's otherwise and says to you, you know, something terrible has happened to me, as humans and Christians, the response isn't to look up a policy and see, what do I do now? You know, it's more, it's a hug.

The tension to which these comments point is between a defensive institutional response and a response which is experienced as authentically rooted in Christian faith. This tension still exists, particularly for bishops and leaders of religious communities who feel constrained by legal responsibilities or by advice from insurers, as described in earlier chapters. But there are bishops and leaders of religious communities who have resisted institutional defensiveness and given priority to a conscience-based response. One bishop said:

I take the view that you must do what you think is right and to a large extent, respond with spirit and heart, before you respond with mind and legal judgement. If someone is presenting to you as in pain and in suffering, you don't go off and do tests to see if they're really in pain and suffering, you take what measures you can to relieve that pain and suffering.

Several research participants spoke about the need for a theologically based understanding of safeguarding. For several religious in particular, and also for some safeguarding staff, there was unease that the term 'safeguarding' has been adopted from secular social work culture and brought into 'the heart of the Church' when the Church does in fact have a deeper rationale and motivation which enable a richer concept. For a leader of a women's religious congregation:

There's a complete lack of spirituality and theology under it... it's not a Catholic Christian procedure until it's underpinned by Gospel values... until it becomes a system that touches our hearts and ceases to be a set of tick boxes, it's not going to be truly about the Church. It's not going to touch the hearts of the Church; it's going to simply make sure that our behaviour is correct.

It is a sign of broader awareness of this deeper rationale that the *Elliott Review* report introduction began from a theological view of safeguarding, titled *The Dignity of the Person and the Safeguarding Vocation*. There is now more frequent discussion of how safeguarding principles reflect and emerge from Christian faith and Catholic social teaching.

For a safeguarding professional who works with religious communities, the important element is that protecting people, putting in place barriers that stop wrong behaviour is *'part of reaching out, of helping people who are vulnerable, who can't help themselves and it's back to a basic concept of what the religious do, which is working with the vulnerable and speaking out for the voiceless'*.

One further encouraging sign here is small but important. Several participants spoke about their involvement in safeguarding and/or advocacy for survivors in terms of a personal sense of mission, or they described responses to parish situations which might be termed



The approach of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)

The Religious Life Safeguarding Service describes its purpose in terms which resonate with a Gospel based approach. Its statement of purpose begins *'We believe we can create a safer Church by putting victims at the centre of safeguarding and developing an empathy-driven culture.'*⁵⁹ The code for religious, *Integrity in Ministry*, mentioned in Chapter One, sets out principles of behaviour based on Christian faith, including this: *'Religious witness God's love for every human person by sensitivity, reverence and respect in their relationships'*.

'ministry'. In the latter case, a parish group described their willingness to provide support circles for people when an allegation of inappropriate behaviour had been made, but not proven, so that they could continue to belong to the parish. They felt they could manage the risks involved, if they had been allowed to do so. A diocesan safeguarding officer described her work in vocational terms: *'I feel that my safeguarding work comes from a place of faith and of mission'*; for her, safeguarding work is part of *'trying to make the Church the community of faith that I feel we're called to be'*. At the level of parish safeguarding representatives, the perspective of ministry is very strong when they describe their experience, although this role is rarely recognised as a ministry alongside other ministries that the baptised exercise. Listening to one parish safeguarding representative describe a sensitive, relational approach to those who come to her, and hearing how much care she took to enable people to trust her, and even how on occasion she wept with people, it was clear that what was happening was not simply concerned with DBS checks and form-filling, but powerfully compassionate. When carried out in this way, the role becomes a ministry as well as an essential duty fulfilled.

3. The Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse

Comparatively few participants spoke about the Day of Prayer, an initiative of Pope Francis that was adopted by the bishops for England and Wales, taking place in the fifth week after Easter each year. Resources for prayer and liturgies have been developed by a group commissioned by the Bishops' Conference, the Isaiah Journey Group. All Catholic communities, including parishes, dioceses and religious orders, are invited to take part.⁶⁰

A diocesan safeguarding co-ordinator saw the Day of Prayer as a *'golden opportunity'*, but she saw little evidence that it is being taken seriously. Others wondered whether people even knew it was supposed to happen. A woman with experience at both parish and diocesan level who was also a survivor and a member of her local parish council expressed the need for such a day *'where we pray and we fast, or we do something that says, we acknowledge this hurt and we're asking God for forgiveness and healing ... it's only a symbol but it's a very important witness to say, we're taking responsibility.'* When told that such a Day of Prayer was already meant to happen, she observed that *'it was never brought to our attention'*.

When the Day of Prayer is celebrated well, it clearly has an impact. A parish safeguarding representative described how it provided an opportunity for survivors to disclose experience of abuse, if they wished, and to be offered pastoral care:

We used the literature that had been sent to us, and we adapted this literature, and we, [the priest] and I, stood outside at the end, well, inside because it was raining, but just inside the door, just in case, we said, if anybody wants to say anything to us or wants to have a word



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or, in private or anything, we're there at the end. And one Eucharistic minister just came and said, quite openly, he said, I was abused and I said, I didn't know because he'd never told me, and he wouldn't have told me, because he'd never come and so I just said, oh okay, thanks for telling me that, have you got support, and he said, yes, I'm seeing a psychiatrist, and that was enough.

In a parish that had been directly affected by the conviction and imprisonment of a priest who had worked there, and where emotions were still 'raw', the Day of Prayer had particular value and meaning. One woman with wide experience described how at first she was reluctant to go, but found it *'wonderful, and I felt a kind of weight had been lifted'*.

For those who are aware of it, and those for whom the issue of abuse is 'raw', not just individuals but also communities, the Day of Prayer is important. But there was a sense for others that more leadership is needed to explain its importance and meaning and encourage parishes to take part. One of the smaller but definite signs of hope that could be discerned across all the groups who took part in this research is the desire for prayer and for some sort of repentance, the need to *'acknowledge all our sins'*, as one woman explained. The Day of Prayer is not the only way this can happen; but it is a valuable opportunity in which the whole Catholic community can reflect prayerfully on this experience.

4. Acts of resistance

There were many accounts in the data of individual acts of courage and resistance in which both priests and laypeople challenged aspects of how allegations were being mishandled and victims were being failed by insensitive or inadequate responses.

Sometimes this is personal action. One participant described writing a letter to a bishop to challenge specific mishandling. Others wrote letters calling for Cardinal Nichols to resign. Another stopped her direct debit and wrote to the bishop to explain why, diverting her support to justice and peace work. A religious priest challenged his order in relation to an appointment of a priest who had abused adult novices including himself. A victim decided to (physically) fight back against the priest who abused him in his school. Several people in safeguarding roles described decisions to whistle-blow or speak transparently in public about mishandling. A priest described speaking in public about believing a victim's account and being attacked by other priests. There is a strong sense of moral conscience in these acts, but also hints of isolation. It is not easy to step out of line, particularly for office-holders.

There is also an element of resistance in those who have expressed solidarity with victims and survivors. A survivors' group described how they felt encouraged when several diocesan justice and peace groups advocated on their behalf after initially being defensive:

for them to take an interest in our experience was deeply gratifying and I know that some of them, you know, have written directly to the [relevant religious] order and asked them to account for their behaviour towards us.

Resistance becomes more powerful when it is a communal act or practice. A survivor who was a member of a group described below told how he had explained to his parish priest that the religious order in whose care he had been abused would benefit from an annual collection taken in the parish for missionary work overseas. In response, and despite pressure from his bishop not to do this, the parish priest explained the case to the parish community and asked if they wished to have the collection take place, and they decided they did not. When communities or groups are invited to discern what is right and how to act in particular circumstances, their instincts reveal a fine sense of justice.

The resistance stories in this research were not just concerned with direct mishandling or injustice in how survivors have been treated. They also covered resistance to the cultural attitudes associated with clericalism and damaging theology, areas that are explored in detail in Chapter Six. A survivor described standing up in church to argue with a priest who described *'a punishing God'* and who preached that all non-Catholics are damned. A woman refused to use titles in a church-related group setting. Even small actions begin to unpick cultural habits that contribute to a tolerance of abuse. Resistance is not easy or natural for Catholics. One female survivor described the Irish-influenced culture in which she grew up: *'we're not supposed to fight, we're not supposed to take the law into our own hands, we're not supposed to tell the teacher'*.

5 ■ Survivors' voices and activism

The narratives of survivors' voices and activism also describe resistance as well as courage and truth-telling. Their impact was acknowledged by many who spoke to us. In the words of a bishop: *'the real game changer for me, and it's one for which I'm profoundly grateful, is the continuing of the growing impact of survivors and them finding a voice'*. Several people understood well that listening to survivors is not only concerned with their need to be believed and supported. It is equally about what the whole Church needs to hear and how the whole church needs to learn to listen. Another bishop, speaking about the leadership of Pope Francis in this area, commented:

And I think he demonstrates to us, bishops, priests, that this is central to his pastoral mission, to meet with victim survivors; they are the Church; they're teaching us something, and we have to accept them as teachers that the Lord is sending to us.

A priest who is also a survivor extended this insight: *'They're telling us more than just about sexual abuse. They are telling us something about the structures of power in the Church and how it works'*. Another bishop reminded us that listening to survivors helps us not only in how we respond to instances of abuse; equally, he said, *'it will impact on the way we listen to everybody.'*



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Survivors described ways they had chosen to resist being silenced or disbelieved and actions they had taken to seek justice or recognition. Some had written blogs or memoirs or transmuted their experience into other creative forms. Some had confronted their abusers decades on from the abuse. Some had launched legal action as a result of the institutional denial of their experience. One group of survivors who had all been abused in the same Catholic institution described a campaign over many years to seek justice in the form of acknowledgement and apology from the religious order concerned. They enlisted leaders at all levels of the Church before finally it took papal influence to compel an adequate response from the order's leadership.

Another survivor described how he realised that he had to turn his anger into *'something useful'*, and found out where his abuser's grave was, intending to deface his headstone with graffiti. He saw this as achieving *'a catharsis'*, but then realised he did not need to do this because *'I now have the power over him. Everything is, well, surprise, surprise, everything's ultimately about power.'* Another described a sense of mission: *'I think it's a mission really, it's something I would want to engage in for the rest of my life'... 'there's a strong message to be got over there, and for me, it's a lifelong devotion really to make sure that that lesson is learned.'*

Survivors' activism is not only oriented towards their own experience and their need for acknowledgement and some kind of care or redress. For many of those that took part in this research, it then extends into advocacy and action on issues that affect others and on reforms that are needed. Some survivors find this advocacy role valuable. A senior safeguarding leader reflected that:

A couple of survivors have said to me, when I have to speak about my own case, I feel very drained, I feel very down, I feel quite, I struggle with it. When I'm speaking about how things can be different, I'm energised, it gives me a buzz.

The survivors group already mentioned who sought acknowledgement of their experience and enlisted the Pope were also motivated by the need to ensure that the order was taking safeguarding seriously:

They're dealing with children all over the place, I want them to be aware of what happened to us and [so that] it doesn't happen to children in places like Africa, South America, Central America, where conditions are the same as they were in Britain in the sixties and seventies. The protection of children isn't there.

A female survivor described her decision to try to help a Catholic institution with their safeguarding work, as part of her efforts not to be defined by her abuse and to overcome her desire to condemn all parts of the Church: *'I would have been cross with myself if I hadn't have tried to change things as well, if I'd allowed things to carry on and not said anything. I've done too much of that and then regretted it.'* For this survivor, participation was hard but *'it was part of me healing as well.'* Survivors who are ready for this work offer informed and reflective insights and suggestions which contribute to the healing of the Church as well as their own healing.

Other survivors became involved in advising the Elliott Review panel or in aspects of implementing its recommendations. Some have also been involved in encounters and training for bishops and the priests and deacons in their dioceses. There are sensitive questions here for both survivors and those who recognise the importance of their voices. The role they could play in training for example, is immensely valuable, including in priestly formation where their voices are not currently directly heard. A fairly recently ordained priest felt that not having been able to listen to 'live' survivor voices during his formation (although written texts of survivor experiences may be used in counselling training) left him *'impoverished'*. But the expectation that survivors should continually be willing to recount their experience so that others can learn risks asking them to re-enter traumatic memories so that others can learn and could be seen or felt as exploitative. A safeguarding office-holder explained her awareness of this:

A survivor described it to me as, every time he has to speak about it or write about it, it's a bit like, you know the scene in Harry Potter, where he has to write his lines and it comes out like a pen on the back of his hand, and he's left with that bleeding scar, it's like that.

Some survivors are very willing to do this; others may be willing, but not necessarily at the right stage in their own healing process. It can be difficult for survivors and those who accompany them or seek their help to work through the discernment needed. The well-being of survivors is always the first priority but it also matters to welcome their desire to play a part in training and reform.

6 ■ Compassionate response: parish communities affected by a case of abuse

One of the strong messages from this research is about recognising the impact on whole communities when they are directly affected by a case of abuse in their context or by the suspension, arrest or imprisonment of a priest whose ministry they have received. This impact has been described in Chapter Two. In this chapter, we draw some reflections from priests and other parish members about what enables a community to respond with courage and appropriate honesty and care, based on their faith.

In this area, there is little to guide priests and parish leaders. There do not seem to be any accessible published resources or guidance that describe how to communicate with and accompany affected parish communities, although it was clear that among the research participants there were laypeople and priests who had insight and wisdom from direct experience. Their reflections illuminate good practice and point to some principles which can guide response. In order to safeguard the anonymity of the parishes concerned, we present their experience as examples of good practice when a parish is directly affected by the arrest or conviction of a priest who has worked with them.

The first principle which guides compassionate response to communities is simple: a recognition that the parish community deserves to know as much as possible as soon as possible and to be given time and space to accept, understand and grieve or lament over a painful knowledge. The greatest possible degree of transparency is essential. Revealing what has happened is a complex process with various stages, and timing and availability of information may be determined in part by criminal justice proceedings. In one parish experience, we heard how swiftly news of an arrest spread on social media, so that some people heard about it ahead of the planned parish communication. In another case, the sudden unexplained disappearance of a priest led to rumours and distress.

- Those who lead the parish and its connected schools -- priests, deacons, head teachers and pastoral and administrative staff -- need to know first. It matters hugely at this point that *all* involved in pastoral leadership or parish employment find out together at the same time because they will all play key roles in handling how the parish community responds. It is also crucial to explain what is known and what is not known or what cannot be shared, and to explain why some information cannot be given.
- There will need to be carefully planned communication first to the whole parish community and then also to ecumenical and other partners. Parish leaders, either priests or others, need to tell the mass-going community what has happened and what they know and don't know and why, again including an explanation of what cannot be shared. This is probably best done at Sunday Mass, which in practice may mean co-ordinating across several churches if the parish is a cluster or partnership of churches. It is also crucial that priests and other parish leaders are available after Mass so that they can hear and respond to the initial shock and sadness and understand what questions people have.

Even if the disclosure relates to a priest who left the parish some time ago, or who has served elsewhere in the diocese, a parish community may still be affected. One crucial element of good practice is for someone from the parish to be aware of anyone in the parish who is a victim or survivor of abuse (which may not be connected to the Catholic Church) for whom the news may trigger fresh pain, and to offer advance warning of the disclosure and offer support. A priest who had to lead a parish disclosure explained: *'there may be people you need to speak to before the announcement's made.... I gave them advance warning, so they either could choose not to be in church or to be in church.'*

A second principle is the importance of listening. Following the initial communication, it is important to offer spaces for people to talk and ask questions and feel that they are being listened to. This could happen in existing parish groups or regular meetings or in gatherings set up for this purpose. Whilst raw feelings and questions may emerge soon after people have heard the news, the shock and other painful emotions will continue or may re-emerge later on. There may be stories in the media which re-open their painful feelings or anniversaries or events which bring back the questions raised.

It is tempting to think that the task here is for parish leaders, usually the priests, to listen to the parish members, the baptised. But there are other ways of seeing the task of listening. It was clear from one parish experience described to us that listening had been mutual and reciprocal; priests and other pastoral leaders and anyone else who works for or with the parish also need to talk about their feelings and reactions.

Two other possible forms of listening may be needed. In some situations, parish members may need to express their feelings to someone from the diocese. If there is anger or if larger questions are raised by their particular experience, it matters that they are able to speak to those who work at other levels of authority and feel that they are listened to. And it is always valuable to consider whether there are some for whom the disclosure has been deeply disturbing or triggered other memories or emotions and they need professional help.

A third principle is to consider how to bring the distress and pain the community is experiencing into its communal prayer. The annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors is an opportunity which can be used, but there may be a need for something more immediate. The resources produced by the Isaiah Journey can be adapted in many different ways. They include a parish retreat session, a Service of Sorrow and Acknowledgement of Abuse, material for a prayer vigil with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and other materials.

As already noted, for many Catholics who view the world with the eyes of faith, the experience of coming to terms with abuse in the Church brings a need to lament or even repent, on behalf of the whole body of believers. Others may be caught in anger or deep confusion, but these too may contain a desire for justice or accountability that comes from faith. All these emotions and instincts open up the possibility of a faith-filled response. If parish leaders can notice or draw out these needs and desires, communities can discover a path to growth as well as healing.

Disclosure and parish relationships and maturity

As we pieced together what could be learned from different parish experiences, both negative and positive, we noticed a pattern. How disclosure of a priest's arrest or offence is handled in a parish is likely to be an expression of the relationships and ethos of the parish. How it is arranged and how people are invited to respond will express more than just a reaction to difficult news. It will express how priests and people work together and care for each other and what kind of culture and faith life the parish has.

It was evident from our listening that when relationships between priests and people are collaborative, open and based on a sense of equality, a parish disclosure is made easier by and deepens those relationships. The right kind of disclosure process can build rather than damage trust. Most importantly, if relationships are good, people are more able to respond *from faith*. In one experience of disclosure, where such relationships existed and had long characterised the parish community, the responses



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expressed sadness, generosity and care, and pondered questions of shared responsibility.

If relationships are less open or lay leadership and collaborative working is less developed, and attitudes are more passive and unquestioning, people may hear the news in a more isolated way and be less able to navigate and process the feelings raised by what they have learned. If people sense that information is being withheld, they lose trust and difficult emotions are reinforced. In one parish where information about a previous priest's offences was not well communicated, there was sadness and some cynicism.

It matters too how priests are open about what they have felt and thought as they absorbed what had happened. In Chapter Two we explored the impact of abuse cases on priests, and in Chapter Six, we explore the underlying habits of clericalism which are implicated. In a parish disclosure experience, priests can choose to be open about the impact on their own faith and on their ministry and to share their emotions, whether of grief, incomprehension or vulnerability. When parish relationships are such that priests feel safe to do this, people will almost always respond with generosity and care. They will also feel more able to express their own feelings. Then the parish as a community is more able to take the experience into their life of prayer and to grow in healthy relationships.

What happens afterwards

After listening to different parish experiences of receiving a disclosure about a priest they knew, a further challenge emerged. It is tempting to assume that when some time has passed, the impact has diminished or disappeared. The voices we heard suggest that this is not what happens. The impact becomes part of the parish story and part of people's personal faith journeys. It is important that it is not buried. This matters particularly when the priest or priests who serve the parish change; people need to know that what has happened, and its impact, is recognised and understood by any new priests or new pastoral leaders that come. It was encouraging to hear from a priest who had moved to a parish that had experienced a disclosure that his bishop had been *'very much aware of the lingering pain and upset that is there'*.

There is a generative resource too in these experiences. It is possible that in some parishes, the aftermath might include a sense of the need to listen to survivors or to explore how to develop ministries of care and support. It might lead to expressions of solidarity with survivors or groups working for change. It might also lead to questions about such matters as seminary formation or accountability in the Church which people want to explore. We return to this area in Chapter Eight.

7. Compassionate response to victims and survivors

Although all the survivors who took part in this research had experienced poor responses when they disclosed their abuse or made allegations to office-holders in Catholic institutions, some had also found individuals or places associated with Catholic faith that provided care and accompaniment that they found helpful. The crucial threshold for several survivors was when someone believed them. One survivor described a conversation with a priest during a parish walk:

There was something that made it different, that I felt that, I think it was the comment of, I know what your dad's like, made all the difference. Because... that just made the difference, and it was like, he might believe me, I might trust, suss this out. It was a glimmer of hope.

Later when she reached a crisis point, she contacted him again, and told him her full story:

It was the first person I'd ever told about any of the things that had ever happened to me. And he just said, he was proud of me and as simple as that, it was, it was so, it was really simple but very effective.... it's about trust and he didn't tell me that, he never said I'd done anything wrong, he just said, that shouldn't have happened and I'm sorry that happened to you, well done and, and I'm always, and it was that opening.

Another survivor who had experienced denial by the institution in which he was abused, and later mishandling when he asked another relevant institution to investigate and press for a response, described the impact of a meeting with a bishop from a different diocese. He spoke of the sensitivity, openness and transparency that the bishop had shown, which enabled the survivor to trust him despite knowing how hard he found it to trust men. He recalled saying to him: *'here I am, handing over to you and trusting you with an issue, to deal with an issue that has been the most life-changing and life-affecting issue that has ever affected me'*. He took away from the encounter a sense of having an ally, a relationship which meant a great deal to him.

A priest with experience of working with survivors proposed an important principle, that there should be spaces of care for survivors that are independent of the institutional Church. Describing his work, he said:

I think that we have a big advantage in terms of working with clerical abuse survivors, that we're not seen as an arm of the Bishops Conference. You know, we're actually one stage removed and so I think people, for that reason, can trust us in a way that it's quite different from going to say a diocesan safeguarding person, where you sort of feel, rightly or wrongly, often wrongly, you know, based on the sort of paranoia that somehow they're part of the establishment.

There were not enough of these 'glimmers of hope' in the experience of the survivors who spoke in this research, but there were some. They were also evident in how safeguarding staff spoke about the 'ethical approach' to safeguarding described earlier, and in how some office-holders spoke about survivors they had met or in whose cases they had had some involvement. The sense of compassion and of justice owed was evident in

the desire of a couple of office-holders to increase the compensation payments to victims. Another safeguarding office-holder spoke with deep sympathy and understanding of the hurt caused by mishandling and of a deep personal commitment to engagement with survivors.

It was striking that when we asked, in interviews, whether participants could describe examples of good practice in safeguarding, few could give any examples. Yet there were many small narratives in which people went beyond the formality of policies or the appropriate distancing associated with professionalism and became personally and compassionately involved with survivors. For those involved in pastoral ministry, this seems obvious, giving priority to a pastoral and Gospel based response, as described earlier. For others, those in professional roles in Catholic settings, it is a choice or an invitation. The Church has learned from this crisis the value of professionalism; we are still learning how best to balance its high standards with instincts ultimately rooted in the Gospel.

We also found that few of the priests who contributed to this research had had the opportunity to sit and listen in person to victims and survivors. One priest, a monk, spoke of how his desire to respond in some way led him to seek training in appropriate skills, but he had never been called upon to use them. Whilst some priests may find this area difficult, many others would offer deep compassion and accompaniment. Some religious also spoke of the desire to support survivors. One religious sister described it this way:

People have obviously felt safe with us, because of being women, I suppose, and I imagine our way of life must give us a sense of depth I think, with the, our prayer life and community life, so I've certainly heard of some sisters who have been extremely supportive of victim survivors and I suspect that there may be more who are being discreet about it and giving the support because sometimes if the person (is) sharing deeply about their pain and experience, they will want to know it was being held in one place.

Another female religious pointed out that this is delicate work, describing it as *'very hard terrain for people to enter into correctly... using the right language, taking the right tone, asking the right questions. It's almost a specialist, you know, you need an extra sensitivity.'*

8 ■ **Conclusion: Glimmers of hope**

The data considered in this chapter points towards another perspective on the abuse crisis which stands alongside the trauma, pain and mishandling. There are many people, lay, religious and ordained, across the whole Church who deeply desire to offer a response that comes first of all from the resources of Catholic faith and the Gospel. The necessity of identifying and operating strong safeguarding policies modelled on wider good practice may sometimes distract from awareness of such instincts, and they have been slow to emerge. But they do exist, at every level, alongside and sometimes within the hard work and chastening experience of learning and adopting safeguarding practices. The courage of survivors also plays an indispensable part in calling the Church to be what it should be, a place of compassion and healing.