

### **What sparked the Past Cases Review?**

There was no particular issue but rather it was the desire of us as Methodists to learn even more than we have already from the past in order to make the present church a safe place for everyone in all situations. We also wanted to create a further opportunity for any who have suffered abuse or harm within the life of the church to feel safe to come forward to tell us about their experience so that we can further learn and be able to support them.

### **What did you find?**

Over the 70 years we considered there were 30 safeguarding related cases. A small number of these were actually situations where the church had been able to protect those at risk but sadly most were not. We did find that the majority of cases did not result in any police action, despite being reported to the authorities. This is because the actions being investigated were far short of what we expect of ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ but were not criminal actions. But we found too many situations where we failed to fully protect children and adults from harm. We fell far short of our calling as disciples.

### **What response has the Church made?**

The first and most important response has been to apologise without reserve to all those who have been victims of abuse in the life of our Church. The apology made by the Church is as follows:

*We apologise. The Methodist Church in Ireland apologises without reserve to all those who have been victims of abuse in the life of our Church. We have failed you, failed society and failed our Saviour. Our processes that were designed to protect all have not done that. We have caused pain that goes beyond measure. We apologise that we have not been the beacon of light that we are called to be. It has taken us too long to recognise our failings and face up to the truth. We have failed to listen carefully to what we were being told in the past. We apologise.*

There are 14 recommendations detailed in the report which have now been accepted by the Church and are being acted on. These are detailed on pages 17-19 of the report, and we encourage everyone to read the full report. They cover areas including how we ensure we keep the fullest records, how we address allegations, the need for continually updating our training and a way to monitor that we are doing all this. We have recommended that our schools carry out a similar review and report to their governing bodies, although we were gratified that nothing in the review pointed to any issues in our educational establishments. One recommendation is that we develop a theology of safeguarding. This is to further ensure that we understand safeguarding as part of who we are as Methodists and not some that we just do. Each action is to make the Church an even safer place than it is today, so that all within our life can be safe from harm.

**How many convictions were there?**

This was in single figures. While this might seem low given the 70 years span of the review, even if there was just one occasion when we didn't stop harm and abuse happening, then we would have issued the same apology and accepted all the recommendations. We must be a safe place for all, and we resolve to be this today and every day.

We have reported a higher number of cases to the PSNI and An Garda Síochána including some that we thought most unlikely to have been criminal acts, but where there is any possibility of a criminal act our Safeguarding Officer will immediately contact the relevant authorities and then follow their direction. And we urge anyone who considers they have been a victim of abuse to contact the PSNI or An Garda Síochána alongside contacting our Safeguarding Officer, or the minister or designated person for safeguarding in their church.

**How can we be sure that everything was considered?**

The whole point of this review has been to learn from the past in order to make the Church safe for all today and tomorrow. We have shone a light on our past to learn and to enable us to better hear the voices of victims and survivors. So that all could be certain that there has been no attempt to hide anything, the Chair of the review is not a member of our Church. Dr Deborah Webster is a highly skilled expert in the area of safeguarding and she has overseen the process and had access to every case and every record that we hold that is in anyway related to safeguarding.

We were contacted by Judith Gillespie, chair of the group set up by Stormont to examine Magdalene laundries, mother and baby homes and clerical child abuse. After those helpful conversations we approached Judith Gillespie and invited her to appoint someone to our review group who would have full access to everything. This offer wasn't taken up but demonstrates our wish to be as objective and comprehensive as possible.

**What happens next?**

We implement all the recommendations, redouble our efforts and continue to strive to ensure that our Church is the safest place it can be for all. We are continually grateful to the work of past and present safeguarding officers, those designated with safeguarding responsibilities in circuits and for all who assist us in making our Church safe. Our task is to share and show the love of Christ to all. We have failed in this on occasions in the past, allowed abuse and harm to happen and we are deeply sorry. We resolve that we will be a safe place for all, that we will fully implement all the recommendations as speedily as possible and that all who are in the life of our Church may experience love, acceptance and God's grace.