

Safeguarding newsletter



Newsletter issue: 4

Date: October 2021

Introduction

With many of the restrictions we have lived with for the past 18 months come to an end, I am reminded of this poignant Bob Dylan lyric: ‘Come gather ‘round people wherever you roam ...for times, they are a-changin’.

If, like me, you are more prone to patterns of self-judgement during periods of change, I invite you to gather your thoughts, to gather your mental strength and composure, and to safeguard against the mind’s tendency to self-judge. Find space in this period of change, find kindness inward and within, find humility and a joyous heart in our ability to love and be loved.

This quarter’s newsletter will highlight some significant changes happening within the URC that not only raise the profile of safeguarding but embed safeguarding within our governance structures.

Hiring has now begun for the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the new role title for the Safeguarding Adviser, and a new Safeguarding Training and Development Coordinator.

A prominent feature of this newsletter is a digest of the latest IICSA report and the safeguarding papers that went to General Assembly in July 2021. The passed resolutions include changes to the structures of safeguarding in the URC, the formation of a new safeguarding committee, updates to the Safeguarding Training Framework and additions to the DBS background checks for churches.

Special thanks must go to Synod Safeguarding Officers and Adrian Bulley who have worked hard to shore up the safeguarding team during a period of transition and change.

With kindest wishes, Matt Baxter, Assistant Administrator (Safeguarding).

Changes to legislation about Positions of Trust: One of our SSOs, Jan Murphy, attended an All-Party Parliamentary Group in October 2019 to give evidence on behalf of the URC in support of a change in the legislation. We now have a new Bill, The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Positions of Trust. The factsheet sets out the intention to extend “positions of trust” to include situations where certain activities take place in sport or religion. Details of what they are going to do and how they are going to do it can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-positions-of-trust-factsheet>

GA papers

Much gratitude is owed to those who played a part in the creation of six General Assembly papers. The information, amendments and resolutions delivered in these papers will solidify the crucial work of implementing the Safeguarding Strategic Plan within the URC and assist in making the URC a safer place to work and worship. You can access all the papers here with a simple right click.

- Paper T1 [Annual safeguarding report 2020](#) (PDF | 68kb)
- Paper T2 [Additions to URC Structure](#) (PDF | 56kb)
- Paper T3 [Safeguarding Advisory Group](#) (PDF | 25kb)
- Paper T4 [Safeguarding Policy Statement](#) (PDF | 61kb)
- Paper T5 [Safeguarding Training Framework](#) (PDF | 68kb)
- Paper T6 [Criminal Record Check](#) (PDF | 39kb)

Paper T1 Annual Safeguarding Report 2020

In 2021, the Annual Safeguarding Report was written by the SSO for Southwest Synod, Jan Murphy, and includes deep insights into the changes and developments faced by churches and safeguarding during lockdowns. Key findings and updates include:

- Work is being carried out by Ministries regarding the recruitment of Elders.
- The reporting of concerns to outside authorities were higher for adults at risk than they were for children: the types of abuse recorded included domestic abuse, physical abuse, self-neglect, sexual abuse of children and bullying.
- The delivery of Safeguarding training online has been very popular and seems to have increased awareness of safeguarding concerns and strengthened the relationship between SSOs and attendees. It has, however, also proven a barrier for some.

- The report highlighted that, as a matter of urgency, the process of safer recruitment in churches requires more support: a tendency to solely rely on DBS checks needs addressing; the publication of a new GP5 appendix to accompany will help to provide churches with further resources.
- Some churches need further support to update their safeguarding policies, the report also acknowledges the adverse effect of the pandemic had on the ability of churches to update their policies.
- When churches create contracts for those who pose risks, they must consult their SSO– the report discovered that several SSOs were unaware of some contracts in their synods contrary to advice given in GP5.
- Moving forward, a lot of work has been done by SAG and the SSPG to simplify the annual church returns forms for 2021. There is also a plan to digitise the forms.

Paper T2 Additions to the structures

With extensive consultation and lead by Adrian Bulley the creation of paper T2 heralds, for the first time, the addition of safeguarding functions to the structures of the URC. Its resolutions make explicit that the primary responsibility of safeguarding in local churches lies with local churches – its meetings and Elder’s meetings. It is then the responsibility of synods to support the churches with safeguarding policy, the Safeguarding Co-ordinators, safeguarding training, and monitoring the implementation of safeguarding through the annual church returns.

Paper T3 Safeguarding Committee

Paper T3 saw the passing of resolution 46: that Mission Council’s Safeguarding Advisory Group be disbanded and that a Safeguarding Committee be assembled as a standing committee of General Assembly. The Safeguarding Committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of General Assembly’s Safeguarding Policy throughout the URC. The development of the Committee is partly in recognition of the need to implement lessons learned from the Past Case Review and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

T4 Safeguarding Policy statement

Paper T4 sees the adoption of a URC safeguarding policy statement at General Assembly and commends it to church meetings, elder’s meetings, and synods for consideration and implementation. The overall aim is to underpin the implementation of safeguarding throughout all the councils of the URC.

T5 Safeguarding Training Framework

T5 saw the passing of resolution 48: a formal adoption of the Safeguarding Training Framework. The framework now outlines four levels of training: pre-foundation, foundation, Intermediate and advanced. It stipulates, by role, which level is relevant/necessary (see Appendix 2 of the framework).

T6 URC roles eligible for a criminal record check – updated

General Assembly approved the updated matrix of roles eligible for a criminal record check. The new additions to the matrix include the following roles eligible for enhanced without barring checks: serving Elders, assembly accredited lay preachers, locally recognised worship leaders in training, and those authorised to preside at the sacraments of communion and baptism. The roles that now require basic checks are Church Caretakers and Cleaners, Church Administrators, Church Treasurers, and Synod Treasurers.

Affirmative action towards an Anti-racist Church: The Equalities Committee presented their report to General Assembly which can be found at Pages 71 to 77 of the GA Book of reports. An appointed group will be tasked to make recommendations and to explore how the URC might implement a policy of 'affirmative action' to address underrepresented Black and ethnic minority people in Assembly-appointed posts; to explore a recruitment policy which actively engages with, and seeks to correct, the current racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts.

IICSA – Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report

This latest report is one of a number of reports that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has produced. If you would like to read the full report, or parts of it, please see <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/child-protection-religious-organisations-and-settings-investigation-report-september-2021>. This report repeats what the Inquiry have said in other reports:

“What marks religious organisations out from other institutions is the explicit purpose they have in teaching right from wrong; the moral turpitude of any failing by them in the prevention of, or response to, child sexual abuse is therefore heightened. The religious organisations and settings examined in this investigation have a range of theological beliefs and practices. Respect for a diversity of beliefs is a hallmark of a liberal democracy. However, freedom of religion and belief can never justify or excuse the ill-treatment of a child, or a failure to take adequate steps to protect them from harm.

Highlighted statements from the report include:

- Adequate child protection policies and procedures are essential in ensuring that children are protected against sexual abuse perpetrated by individuals connected with religious organisations and settings.
- There are a number of factors that may impede the effective reporting and management of allegations of child sexual abuse, which they set out.
- Those in leadership positions provide direction to the organisation and are vital in stressing the importance of child protection and generating changes – by their actions as well as their words, which includes acting decisively to ensure that child protection failures are challenged, and steps are taken to learn lessons.
- Internal investigatory or disciplinary processes should not be used as a substitute for reporting to external authorities.
- The services that were offered to people who had been abused were ad hoc and very much dependent on access to local support services. It would be helpful for religious organisations to be aware of counselling and support services available nationally or in their local area, or for these to be developed
- Forgiveness is central to the teachings and practices of many religions. However, care must be taken to avoid creating a culture in which the encouragement of forgiveness results in safety concerns and the assessment of risk to others being overlooked.
- There was a broad measure of support for oversight of child protection by a body external to the religious organisation.

There are several matters that will be explored further by the Inquiry (although they state that this list is not exclusive)

- Mandatory reporting.
- Vetting and barring.
- Regulation of the voluntary sector in respect of religious organisations and settings.
- Introducing primary legislation to provide those voluntary settings adhere to basic child protection standards.

If you would like to read the full report, or parts of it, please see

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/child-protection-religious-organisations-and-settings-investigation-report-september-2021>

Further updates will follow. The final report is currently due to be published in the summer of 2022.

Updates to DDC: DDC have updated guidelines in line with new DBS identity guidelines. The good news here is that verifiers using DDC will not have to make any changes – DDC will update the system and all documentation to reflect the updated guidance. However, you may want to update any internal documents. Main changes include the removal of all references to EEA in the UK national route, amendments to the primary documents for the international route and you must do a separate check to make sure a job applicant is allowed to work in the UK. DDC are happy to talk you through the changes if you have any doubts or have applicants struggling to provide supporting documentation.

Affirmative action towards an Anti-racist Church

The Equalities Committee presented their report to General Assembly which can be found at Pages 71 to 77 of the GA Book of reports

The following resolution was passed:

General Assembly instructs the Equalities Committee to form a small group to:

- Explore how the URC might implement a policy of 'affirmative action' to address the persistent underrepresentation of Black and ethnic minority people in Assembly-appointed posts (see table in appendix one).
- Specifically explore the possibilities and practicalities of a recruitment policy which actively engages with, and seeks to correct, the current racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts.
- Bring recommendations arising from the work of the small group to General Assembly 2022.

Please see below for more reading on this crucial topic

- Paper I2 to Mission Council March 2021 https://urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March-2021/I2_update_on_anti-racism.pdf
- Statement and prayer by Karen Campbell, the United Reformed Church's Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, and the (then) Moderators of the URC General Assembly, the Revd Nigel Uden and Derek Estill <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3476-urc-leaders-say-that-we-must-all-be-anti-racist-following-the-brutal-killing-of-george-floyd.html>
- Article and resources: <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3511-black-lives-matter-urc-youth-stands-in-solidarity>

COVID-19 Update: Guidance for churches on the loosening of restrictions

On 19 July, the Church of England issued updated guidance for: [Opening and managing church buildings in step 4 of the Roadmap out of Lockdown, V.1](#). There is also a range of material on the C of E website that might be helpful, including:

- [Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public, V.10](#);
- [COVID-19 NHS Test & Trace Data, V.5](#);
- [Test and Trace consent form template](#);
- [Test and Trace online privacy notice template](#);
- [Test and Trace privacy notice template](#).
- A new [video](#) from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) explains how having adequate ventilation can help you reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in your workplace. It includes advice on identifying poorly ventilated areas and using CO2 monitors, improving natural and mechanical ventilation, and how to keep work vehicles ventilated.

Changes to legislation about Positions of Trust

One of our SSOs, Jan Murphy, attended an All-Party Parliamentary Group in October 2019 to give evidence on behalf of the URC in support of a change in the legislation. Evidence was also given by Dr Daniel Rhind (Loughborough University); Emily Hilton (NSPCC); Jim Foy (National LADO Network); and Samuel Barker (Ex-JW Advocates), all supporting a change in the legislation.

IICSA recommended an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 in its report on the [Diocese of Chichester and Peter Ball](#) in May 2019.

Evidence was taken by IICSA from the Ministry of Justice in May 2020. We now have a new Bill.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Positions of Trust factsheet sets out the intention to extend “positions of trust” to include situations where certain activities take place in sport or religion. Details of what they are going to do and how they are going to do it can be found at:

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Are you safely recruiting in your church?

No-one has an automatic right to work with children or adults at risk. Operating a safer recruitment policy sends a powerful message to parents, children and visitors, as well as those intent on causing harm, that safeguarding children and adults is taken seriously by the URC. Everyone has the right to expect the same standard of recruitment and professionalism regardless of whether that person is a paid worker or volunteer.

DBS checks are not the only method that should be used to determine suitability, especially as some roles may not be eligible to have a DBS check.

Additional safer recruitment processes include:

- Advertise the role
- Write a role description and person specification
- Complete an application form
- Ask for references
- Informal interview/meeting
- DBS check
- Probation period
- Induction and training

What to do if you are concerned about someone- 4R's

The 4 Rs, which are universal in safeguarding, show us what to do if there are concerns about the safety and welfare of someone.

Recognise- You may recognise abuse through something you see, hear or feel. You may see something that seems to clearly indicate that something is wrong, or you may just have a feeling that something is not quite right.

Respond- If abuse remains a secret, abusers will continue to abuse. If someone speaks about the abuse, this can help to end the abuse. Try to support the victim/survivor by listening attentively, remain calm and by being reassuring.

Record- Records should be written up as soon as possible after the event. They should be clear and concise, and it is important that they are legible. Use the individual's own words, and avoid jargon. Notes should be relevant and factual, without including opinions or judgements. It is not your role to verify or prove that the information given is true. If no action follows, it is important to explain the rationale for this decision.

Report- If you have a concern, have witnessed abuse, or it has been disclosed to you, you must report it to your Church Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours.

Supporting Survivors of Historical abuse

The Synod takes all concerns seriously and Belinda, the Synod Safeguarding Officer is always there to listen to any concerns about present or historical abuse. If you would like to talk, please get in touch [here](#) or by calling 07716 640 596.

Reports

Child sexual abuse

The independent inquiry into child sexual abuse (IICSA) has published a report looking at present-day experiences of children who have experienced sexual abuse in England and Wales. Findings from the report, based on the accounts of 56 young people aged 11-21 and 77 specialist child sexual abuse support workers, include: young people still face delays in accessing support, the introduction of mandatory reporting could discourage children from disclosing abuse, there needs to be a cultural shift to make talking about sexual abuse easier, relationships and sex education in schools does not reflect current challenges facing children, and creators of social media sites need to take greater responsibility for child safety.

Read the report here: [Engagement with children and young people report - 24 June 2021](#)

Other resources:

Child sexual abuse- the experience of black girls

NSPCC Learning has released a podcast discussing the absence of black girl's experiences of child sexual abuse in research and practice. The podcast discusses why the experiences of black girls is missing from the research and the impact that this has on policy and practice; key findings from research; and learning to improve practice and research. This episode contains quotes from research participants about their experiences which might be upsetting and cause distress.

Listen to the podcast here: [Experiences of black girls within child sexual abuse research and practice](#)

Safeguarding Transgender children

Farrer & Co has released a two-part podcast offering guidance on the law, best practice and how to effectively safeguard transgender children and young people.

Listen to the podcasts: [Safeguarding transgender children](#)

Online Safeguarding Training

To adapt with the changing government guidance and to facilitate learning whilst transitioning into reopening and meeting physically in large groups, the physical training modules have been adapted into a virtual format held via Zoom.

The following dates are available for the **FOUNDATION** module:

- 2nd November 2021 6.30pm
- 2nd December 2021 6.30pm
- 11th January 2022 12pm
- 8th February 2022 6.30pm

(This training will last for approximately 2 hours long).

The roles mandated to attend this training are:

Managers of Synod Safeguarding Officers / Advisors, Church Safeguarding Coordinators, Deputy Church Safeguarding Coordinator, Members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (or its successor), Synod Safeguarding Committees and Reference Groups, Active Ministers and CRCWs (including retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry), Synod Moderators, Youth and Children Workers including volunteer leaders, Youth and Children's Workers (volunteer helpers), Adult Workers including volunteer leaders, Adult Workers (volunteer helpers), Managers of Children, Youth and Adults Workers
Pastoral Workers / Visitors, Synod Clerks, Section O Investigation, Commission and Appeal Panel Members, Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, URC Trustees and Synod Trustees
Elders as local church trustees.

The following dates are available for the **INTERMEDIATE** module:

- 19th October 2021 11am
- 21st October 2021 6.30pm
- 4th November 2021 6pm
- 9th December 2021 6pm
- 27th January 2022 12pm
- 17th February 2022 6pm

(This training will last for approximately 2.5 hours long).

The roles mandated to attend this training are:

Synod Safeguarding Officers / Advisors, Church Safeguarding Coordinators, Deputy Church Safeguarding Coordinator, Active Ministers and CRCWs (including retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry), Synod Moderators, Youth and Children Workers including volunteer leaders, Youth and Children's Workers (volunteer helpers), Adult Workers including volunteer leaders, Adult Workers (volunteer helpers), Pastoral Workers / Visitors, Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers.

*Please note that you will be required to enrol and attend the Foundation training before being enrolled on to the Intermediate training, despite any previous workplace training or expertise.

To book on to this training, please email your name, church, role and preferred date to: safeguarding@urcthamesnorth.org.uk or safeguarding@urcsouthern.org.uk

Upcoming Events for Young People

Youth Get Together - Sunday 24th October

An opportunity for young people aged 15-25 to meet up and get to know each other. We will meet at the O2 London for a game of ten-pin bowling before sharing a meal together. The event is free to attend, and the cost of activities and meal will be covered.

This is a joint event for young people from Southern and Thames North Synods. Email cydo@urcsouthern.org.uk to book a space by Friday 15th October.

Youth Assembly 2022 is being held from 28 to 30 January 2022 at Whitemoor Lakes in Alrewas, Staffordshire. Youth Assembly is a weekend of fun, friendship and fellowship including:

- Youth Decides - discussions
- Workshops and keynotes
- Worship
- Silent Disco

Age: School Year 10 to 26 years (inclusive)

The age limit is extended for 2022 only due to the cancellation of YA 2021.

A creche will be available for children between 0 and 5 years old.

Fully funded spaces are offered for young people attending from Southern Synod. Please contact cydo@urcsouthern.org.uk to secure a space. (Full cost will be covered if booked before the early bird booking deadline of 12 November 2021.)

Book your youth assembly space online at <https://urc.org.uk/urcya.html>

On Tuesday 12 October 2021 from 7pm - 8pm, the URC's Youth Exec is holding a Zoom event for parents/young people/youth leaders to find out more about Youth Assembly 2022.

This is your chance to meet some of the people who have been planning and will be leading the Youth Assembly 2022 weekend. You will be able to hear about some of the plans, the sleeping arrangements, the travel and what type of things will be happening throughout Youth Assembly. There will also be a time to listen to people who have previously attended and a chance to ask any questions that you may have about the event.

Coming to this information event does not in any way commit you or your young person to attending Youth Assembly this year!

Register for this information event on Eventbrite - <https://bit.ly/urcya-info-event>

Children & Youth Friendly Church Scheme

The Children and Youth Friendly Church Scheme is an exciting opportunity to look afresh at your church's life with children, young people and families. Guided by a trained accompanier, a local congregation can begin to explore your strengths, your values, your opportunities, your hopes and dreams.

This scheme will enable you to identify all that you currently do and how to develop your welcome to children, young people and families in a process which will encourage, reflect and celebrate with you in preference to giving you a series of hurdles to jump and boxes to tick.

The Children and Youth Friendly Church is a programme of the United Reformed Church which recognises and encourages excellence in churches welcoming children, young people and families. Churches are supported by an accompanier and receive a certificate and plaque upon successful completion.

Join us at one of our upcoming online information events to find out more about the new scheme.

Tuesday October 19, 7pm-8pm or Friday October 22nd, 2pm-3pm.

Email cydo@urcsouthern.org.uk to book.

Hybrid Church for all - leading multi-sensory worship; practicalities of hybrid church; learning from experience. Via Zoom.

On 14th October, Dan Morrell will be looking at the technical side and practicalities of hybrid church.

On 21st October, come along and learn how three local URC ministers have been running hybrid services in their churches with different styles and different levels of tech.

We are delighted once again to be able to offer grants of up to £200 from the Carmichael Montgomery Bursary. These grants will be open to all who attend to help put learning into action, for example through buying equipment, licenses, further training or resources.

Please book online at <https://hybrid-church-workshops.eventbrite.co.uk>

You can experience the previous training sessions on the Children and Youth YouTube channel.

<https://bit.ly/urc-training-vids>

Online Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

New dates available for Online Youth Mental Health First Aid Training in November 2021

This is a certificated course coordinated by Mental Health First Aid England.

<https://mhfaengland.org>

This online course trains you as a Youth Mental Health First Aider, giving you:

- An in-depth understanding of young people's mental health and factors that affect wellbeing
- Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues
- Confidence to reassure and support a young person in distress
- Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening
- Knowledge to help a young person recover their health by guiding them to further support – whether that's through self-help sites, their place of learning, the NHS, or a mix – engaging with parents, carers and external agencies where appropriate
- Ability to support a young person with a long-term mental health issue or disability to thrive
- Tools to look after your own mental wellbeing

Learning takes place through four live training sessions spread across two weeks with self-learning activities in between.

Session 1 - Introduction to Mental Health First Aid

Session 2 - Depression, anxiety and self-care

Session 3 - Suicide and psychosis

Session 4 - Self harm, eating disorders, recovery and action planning

Full details of course content is available on the MHFA England website -

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/youth/online-youth-mental-health-first-aid/>

This will be an evening course, with the 4 live sessions taking place from 18:30-21:30 on the following dates.

Session 1 – Monday 15th November

Session 2 – Tuesday 16th November

Session 3 – Monday 22nd November

Session 4 – Tuesday 23rd November

Full details about the course are available via the Eventbrite link below and via the MHFA England website

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/youth/online-youth-mental-health-first-aid/>

There are spaces at a subsidised rate of £27.75 per person. (The full cost of course is normally £300pp)

Bookings can be made via this Eventbrite link - <https://evening-mhfa.eventbrite.co.uk>

Special recognition:

We would like to thank Matt Baxter (Assistant Administrator (Safeguarding)) for all he has done to ensure that essential safeguarding tasks have continued to operate in this time of vacancy and change and would echo his thoughts to show compassion to ourselves as well as others as we navigate our way through more change.