

A Letter to the Church Family from the Wardens

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We thank God our Father that he has called each one of us to the church family at St Andrew the Great to worship and serve him. We are grateful for the many ways God has provided for us and looked after us over the years.

We write to inform you of two important safeguarding matters. In view of time constraints, we are sorry not to be able to speak to you in person.

Many of you will be aware of the recent allegations of abuse concerning the late John Smyth, The Crowded House Church and Jonathan Fletcher. These allegations have led to the commissioning of several safeguarding reports, some of which have already been published. The John Smyth Review commissioned by the Church of England, undertaken by Keith Makin and Sarah Lawrence, is likely to be published in early 2022.

All abuse is abhorrent. It is particularly distressing when it arises within the household of God. Abuse is dishonouring to our Lord and brings disgrace to his gospel of salvation. We have been deeply saddened and disturbed to read the harrowing accounts of abuse in these reports. We profoundly grieve for those hurt by the abuse and we pray for those who continue to experience great pain at this time.

The Wardens and the PCC at St Andrew the Great want to create a safe space for the church family and for those who visit or join our church. We are committed to making safeguarding a priority. We have adopted rigorous policies and procedures which should enable any abuse to be quickly reported and dealt with. If you ever see or experience anything that concerns you, that makes you uncomfortable, or that doesn't seem right, please do speak up. See our safeguarding page at stag.org/safeguarding for contact details both inside and outside the church.

Following the publication of the above mentioned reports the Wardens, the PCC and the staff at St Andrew the Great resolved to reflect humbly and prayerfully on the wider learning recommendations, and to learn any lessons applicable to our church family.

We write now to update the church family on the progress made so far. We also want to take this opportunity to inform you about a related matter arising from the abuse committed by John Smyth.

1. Review of St Andrew the Great

Over the past few months, the Wardens and the PCC have met several times and have decided to conduct a church wide review of all our activities. While we don't have any present safeguarding concerns about our leadership, nor any concerns about our governance or the appointment of staff, we want to do all we can to make sure that we continue to remain a loving and safe church. The review will focus on the church's governance, safeguarding structures and culture whilst always looking to the Bible for guidance as we address these essential components.

With regard to safeguarding, our policies (including their implementation) and structures need to be not merely fit for purpose but exemplary. They need to reflect the scale and nature of our ministry. The safeguarding review will be conducted by the safeguarding committee. An external audit of our safeguarding is proposed for later this year.

A review of the church's governance will give us an opportunity to amend and explain afresh our governance structures. We propose a review of our policies and procedures covering areas such as appointment of staff and church officers, grievance procedures and the making and communicating of decisions.

We also need to ensure that we have a culture where staff and congregation feel able to report any abusive or bullying behaviours. We propose to conduct this review in the form of a questionnaire for the staff team (including some staff who have recently moved on) followed by an interview with each staff member. In addition, a randomly selected sample of small group leaders covering every area of ministry will be invited to complete the questionnaire. We hope that this review of culture will be overseen by an external advisor.

We pray that this review will ensure we are a godly and loving church family.

2. Serious matter concerning John Smyth

The abuse carried out by John Smyth has been widely reported in the national media. During the late 1970s and early 80s, John Smyth abused young men, whom he had met at Winchester College and Iwerne summer camps, by beating them. He claimed that the beatings, masquerading as a grotesque form of 'spiritual discipline', were for their benefit. The scale and severity of the beatings has understandably and rightly been described as 'horrific'. We have been very saddened to read these reports and can only imagine the deep hurt caused by the abuse. The lack of closure almost 40 years later has undoubtedly exacerbated the distress of the victims and their families.

The Church of England has commissioned an independent review and has asked Keith Makin and Sarah Lawrence to consider whether there have been historical failings in the handling of the disclosures by the victims of Smyth's abuse. We welcome this independent enquiry, which is pursuing the case with diligence.

Alasdair and the Wardens have learned that a forthcoming book by Andrew Graystone about John Smyth will name Alasdair as one of Smyth's victims. Sadly, this is in fact true: Alasdair is a survivor of Smyth's abuse from when Alasdair was a student.

We are greatly disturbed that the author has not once contacted Alasdair and does not have Alasdair's permission to make public any facts about the abuse which Alasdair suffered. We believe Mr. Graystone's book 'outs' Alasdair on the grounds that Alasdair failed to publicise this abuse or act on behalf of victims. In this context it is significant that the author has not asked Alasdair for his own account of events, despite the fact that Alasdair experienced them first-hand.

Every survivor of abuse has the permanent right to anonymity. Publicly outing victims without their consent will undoubtedly cause further abuse to the abused and great distress to them and their families.

In light of this invasion of Alasdair's privacy, Alasdair has asked us to share the following personal statement with the church family: [please follow this link to view.](#)

It is totally inappropriate and unacceptable that a victim's name should be publicly revealed without their consent. We are deeply saddened that Alasdair has been forced into making this personal disclosure. It has caused great distress to him and his family.

It is even more inappropriate and unacceptable when a victim is 'outed' in a way which misrepresents the facts relating to them. In fact, Smyth's abuse first came to light when Alasdair was the first to report the abuse he had experienced on 12 February 1982. In addition, it was also Alasdair who reported the matter to Ely Diocesan Safeguarding in 2013.

It would be intolerable to expect any survivor to bear the responsibility to publicise their abuse or to act on behalf of other survivors. The appalling experience of being abused does not bring with it an onerous responsibility to publicise what happened or support other survivors, let alone to do so decades after the event. The right of every survivor to permanent anonymity carries with it the right to keep their experience private and to try to put the experience behind them. Any suggestion that Alasdair was under a duty to publicise his abuse would be nothing short of disgraceful. Despite this, Alasdair went out of his way to help a fellow survivor who contacted him. Alasdair regrets that he was not able to find the appropriate help for this survivor.

With the Wardens' full knowledge and support, Alasdair has fully co-operated with the Makin Review.

Alasdair also contemplated informing the church family about his abuse on numerous occasions. However, he was advised against this by the Wardens as we wanted to respect his right to privacy and did not want to exacerbate his distress. As we have walked with Alasdair over recent years, we have witnessed at first hand the struggle it has been for him to re-engage with this abuse and to have to face the comments made about him. As we have observed Alasdair's anticipation of the impending publication of Graystone's book, we are appalled at how any author or publisher could think it right to 'out' a victim without their consent and in this way.

Please continue to pray for Alasdair and Rachel during this difficult time. We thank God for them and for the many ways they continue to serve us. Alasdair and Rachel feel very well supported by many friends and family, including church members. It is important to allow them time and space during this difficult period.

Please also pray for our church that God would strengthen our resolve to continue our God given mission here in Cambridge.

Finally, if this letter has raised any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Churchwardens at churchwardens@stag.org.

With love in Christ,
Piyush Jani, Matt Byatt, Ugo Akuwudike (Church Wardens)