

Statement from the BCC Trustees for the BCC Website following Safeguarding Sunday on 6th November 2022

1. The Trustees of Bawtry Community Church commissioned an Independent Safeguarding Review by Thirtyone:eight, our Safeguarding Advisory organisation. The review was commissioned after a formal complaint had been made to the church about how leaders had handled a safeguarding situation involving a former member of the church.
2. The complaint stated that the situation had not been dealt with well, and as a result, had caused hurt and distress to church members. It was alleged that a combination of misplaced trust and compassion, and a lack of effective safeguarding and/or knowledge of the manipulative behaviour of sexual predators placed young people in the church in harm's way.
3. The review was undertaken for Thirtyone:eight by a reviewer who had been a police officer for thirty years and worked on the Murder Teams, the Domestic Violence Unit and latterly on the Child Abuse Investigation Team. She brought a practical and experienced insight into the issues around criminal investigations within a church environment and the impact on victims and perpetrators alike.
4. We are very grateful to the reviewer for the sensitive way she conducted the interviews with those who were invited, and agreed, to participate in this process. (They included current and past members of the church.)
5. The eight recommendations in the report “seek to give BCC the tools to move forward but also address some of the concerns of the past.” These recommendations have been unanimously accepted by the Trustees. The Review recommends that BCC should:
 - i. Make a public statement to the church with an open invitation for survivors of abuse to come forward.
 - ii. Update Bawtry Community Church website with information on safeguarding.
 - iii. Promote the role of the Safeguarding Advocate (aka Safeguarding Lead).
 - iv. Produce a job description for the Safeguarding Advocate.
 - v. Ensure that records are kept of all key decisions alongside a risk assessment which documents the information known.
 - vi. Training - Key members in leadership roles should seek to access opportunities for learning and training.
 - vii. Ensure any persons subject to concerns being raised are subject to a Risk Assessment and if appropriate a Written Agreement/Contract of what they can and cannot do.
 - viii. Ensure a clear understanding of trustee duties and responsibilities particularly in relation to safeguarding and serious incidents.

6. As recommended, the Trustees wish to make this public statement on the BCC Website: The Trustees of BCC apologise unreservedly for all errors in judgement that caused hurt and distress to church members and invite anyone who has experienced abuse or distress to come forward and speak to one of our safeguarding team. They recognise, with hindsight, the following:
 - 6.1. "If advice was sought now, best practice would be that a written agreement is put in place to document the areas anyone under police investigation could and could not be involved with and a risk assessment would record the decision making behind this."
 - 6.2. Once the justice system had reached a conclusion, the Church leaders should have been open and publicly accepted the guilty verdict of sexual abuse and the sentence handed down by the court. Such a statement "at the time of the member's conviction would have clearly outlined the position of the church" and stated that the church was appalled by his actions.
 - 6.3. After conviction by the courts, his suspension from membership would have been appropriate.
 - 6.4. The court only dealt with complainants of sexual abuse in a work context, but the Church leaders should have been aware of risks of similar incidents with church attenders at church events. Anyone who believed they had been abused or had significant information should have been encouraged to come forward to the Safeguarding Advocates.
 - 6.5. It should have been made clear that communication from prison was personal and private and in no way endorsed by the Church.
 - 6.6. The Church leaders should have publicly acknowledged the profound hurt suffered by many in Bawtry and the surrounding area and prayed for healing for them alongside the pastoral care and concern for the then member and his family. The Review comments that in not making "efforts to reach out, or welcome anyone affected by the matter to come forward and be supported by the church, the church inadvertently sent out a message to the members that the leadership condoned the member's conduct giving the impression that he was a victim rather than a perpetrator."
 - 6.7. Church leaders should have taken outside professional advice. The Church leaders did not seek advice from the police or any other safeguarding professionals during the investigation but also, during the four years of investigation, the police did not approach the church or think it necessary to do so.

Conclusion:

This case review has highlighted areas where the church leadership failed and has shown us how we can better manage such a situation in the future. We therefore plan to improve our safeguarding practice going forward as recommended by Thirty-one:eight.