

Resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury - Statements

12/11/2024



Following the publication independent review by Keith Makin into the Church of England's handling of allegations of serious abuse by the late John Smyth, **the Archbishop of Canterbury said:**

"Having sought the gracious permission of His Majesty The King, I have decided to resign as Archbishop of Canterbury.

"The Makin Review has exposed the long-maintained conspiracy of silence about the heinous abuses of John Smyth.

"When I was informed in 2013 and told that police had been notified, I believed wrongly that an appropriate resolution would follow.

"It is very clear that I must take personal and institutional responsibility for the long and retraumatising period between 2013 and 2024.

"It is my duty to honour my Constitutional and church responsibilities, so exact timings will be decided once a review of necessary obligations has been completed, including those in England and in the Anglican Communion.

"I hope this decision makes clear how seriously the Church of England understands the need for change and our profound commitment to creating a safer church. As I step down I do so in sorrow with all victims and survivors of abuse.

"The last few days have renewed my long felt and profound sense of shame at the historic safeguarding failures of the Church of England. For nearly twelve years I have struggled to introduce improvements. It is for others to judge what has been done.

"In the meantime, I will follow through on my commitment to meet victims. I will delegate all my other current responsibilities for safeguarding until the necessary risk assessment process is complete.

"I ask everyone to keep my wife Caroline and my children in their prayers. They have been my most important support throughout my ministry, and I am eternally grateful for their sacrifice. Caroline led the spouses' programme during the Lambeth Conference and has travelled tirelessly in areas of conflict supporting the most vulnerable, the women, and those who care for them locally.

"I believe that stepping aside is in the best interests of the Church of England, which I dearly love and which I have been honoured to serve. I pray that this decision points us back towards the love that Jesus Christ has for every one of us.

"For above all else, my deepest commitment is to the person of Jesus Christ, my saviour and my God; the bearer of the sins and burdens of the world, and the hope of every person."

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell said: "As I read the Makin review last week and reflected on the terrible abuse perpetrated by John Smyth and shamefully covered up by others, I am, first of all, moved by the accounts of victims and survivors that we have heard from so powerfully. They were badly let down by many in different parts of the Church of England. I am grateful for their courage to be part of the review.

"As a church we continue to work towards and must achieve a more victim-centred and trauma-informed approach to safeguarding within the Church of England, and this must address the broader questions of culture and leadership. In this regard, much progress has already been made over the last 10 years. Indeed, it has been Archbishop Justin himself who has championed those developments and reforms. Both Justin and I have made our hopes known about the independence of safeguarding discussed both by Makin and also in Alexis Jay's report and look forward to the group already at work on these bringing recommendations which can be both effective and trusted.

"Although Justin Welby has not perpetrated abuse, as Archbishop of Canterbury he has decided to take his share of responsibility for the failures identified by the Makin review. I believe this is the right and honourable thing to do.

"Whilst this is a difficult day for Justin, I pray there will be an opportunity to reflect on and appreciate the many positive aspects of his ministry and his huge commitment to the Church of England, the Anglican Communion and above all the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But I continue to take account of the needs and experiences of victims and survivors and look to the various changes, above all the greater independence of safeguarding, that we need to help ensure these failings never happen again. It is to this ongoing work that I commit myself."

The Bishop of Stepney Joanne Grenfell said: "As Lead Bishop for Safeguarding for the Church of England, I have been acutely aware of the impact of the Makin report and the retraumatizing effects of its publication on victims and survivors of John Smyth's awful abuse.

"With sadness, I fully respect and understand Archbishop Justin's decision today to resign. Although Archbishop Justin has helped the Church of England to achieve much in relation to safeguarding during his tenure, because of the failings identified in the Makin Report, it is now necessary for others to take up the baton.

"Of course, the responsibility for good safeguarding in the Church of England lies with every one of us. Archbishop Justin's resignation does not change that, and his decision today does not absolve any of us from bringing about the wholesale changes in culture and leadership that are essential in every part of the Church.

"I am acutely aware of the need in our current work on safeguarding independence, following the report of Professor Alexis Jay, to bring to General Synod recommendations for moving forward which can be both effective and trusted in this regard.

"I have worked closely with Archbishop Justin since I took on this role and have greatly valued his personal commitment to good safeguarding and his desire to see the whole Church make this a priority."