

Safeguarding Review Update

Action: To be read at Sunday Worship 16 November 2025

This is a statement from David Allen, the Acting Clerk of the General Assembly, who has asked for this statement to be read in all our churches today.

By now you may have heard the distressing news reports about serious safeguarding failings in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. I want to share some things about that with you.

An investigation into the handling of past safeguarding issues at Assembly Buildings level has taken place.

Between 2009 and 2021, with one additional case in 2022:

- we failed to make referrals to statutory authorities when these were required;
- we did not respond adequately to concerns expressed to us about individuals in congregations;
- we failed to respond properly when people asked for help when they had suffered harm;
- we failed to keep proper and adequate records.

Also, we were told by statutory authorities that some offenders wanted to return to worship in Church, and we didn't monitor them as we should.

This was addressed as soon as we discovered it, with the statutory authorities and all required safeguards are now in place.

These failings do not involve our current safeguarding team, and did not involve everyone who was part of our team in the past.

Alongside these failings, there were, and are, staff members doing outstanding work, and we thank them for it.

However, I must say now that these failures are inexcusable, and no excuse is being made for them.

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church, I am deeply sorry.

I'm sorry, firstly, because people have been let down by us. Through past actions, or not acting as we should, we have put people at risk, and we know that some people have been harmed. We have betrayed the trust that people placed in us and I am deeply sorry for the hurt and grief that this has caused. On behalf of the Church, I apologise unreservedly to everyone affected by this and to the wider Church. We want to do everything we can to support victims and survivors of our failings. We are truly sorry.

If you are thinking about disclosing a concern about harm or abuse that has happened, whether that was in the church or somewhere else, I want to encourage you as strongly as possible to do that.

You can contact us, at the PCI response line.

If you don't want to speak to PCI, then please get in touch with the Police or Victim Support. All contact details are available by scanning the QR code displayed on the screen, by going to the PCI website, or by phoning Assembly Buildings and asking for Safeguarding.

I'm sorry as well, because we are part of the Church of Jesus Christ.

He gave His life for us and He is the Head of His Church.

He calls on us to minister and reach out to those around us, showing His love, speaking His Word, and doing all that we can to bring honour and glory to Him.

We have failed our Saviour and Lord, we have dishonoured Him.

I am inexpressibly grieved and ashamed by this – to dishonour our Lord in this way is beyond words.

I ask you to join me in lamenting this, in seeking His forgiveness, and in asking for grace to do whatever He calls us to in light of our sin.

Last Wednesday was the first time we were able to tell people that we had found certain things. That was just the start of a very difficult process. that's going to last for some time.

We will not sweep this under the carpet, we will open ourselves to external review, and will cooperate fully.

An external audit is already underway, designed by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, called Section 12. This audit will review our practices and processes, and will be submitted to the Safeguarding Board.

We have been talking to statutory agencies, and are continuing to do that, because we want to do things right, and we want their help in that. Again, we are co-operating fully.

On 1st December, Dr Richard Murray is due to become Moderator of the General Assembly. That day, he intends to announce that a special meeting of the General Assembly will take place next month.

This was a central failing, and I want to acknowledge people who provide compassionate and safe care in our local safeguarding teams. Thank you for doing that.

For many years, we have been blessed by a team of trainers in safeguarding, and hundreds of designated persons in our congregations.

This is vital local work, and at a time when so much has been called into question, thank you for what you do.

Sometimes, when awful things happen, like this, we wonder what we can do. What we can do is pray.

Please pray to the Lord God Almighty, who is our Loving Heavenly Father.

Pray for those who have been affected by this – those who have been harmed and their families; those who will now be anxious and worried; those who feel betrayed; those who are now suspicious of us; and those who blame us, and may be tempted to blame God.

Pray that those who need help and support will seek it and get it, that they will find comfort and support; and pray that even though the Church has failed them, they will know that the Lord has not.

Please pray for all of our Safeguarding teams and those involved in ministry within the lives of our congregations.

I want to finish by saying again, that we are deeply sorry.

We should not be in this situation.

Join with me in pleading with God to be merciful to us, to forgive us, to purge us of our wrong-doing, and to make us more like the Lord Jesus.

Pray that His will would be done, here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Thank you.