



**PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF EAST ANGLIA
FOR
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
2019**

This Letter is to be read at all Masses during the weekend of March 5/6

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of Lent, I wish to speak to you about the challenges that are undermining the Church's mission and Her ability to proclaim the Gospel to the world of today.

Over the past few months the Church across the world has been shaken by the shocking and heart-breaking revelations of historic abuse of children and vulnerable persons by members of the Church – laity, deacons, religious, priests, bishops and cardinals.

It has also been distressing to learn that some bishops and other religious leaders have failed to respond adequately to accusations made against clergy in their respective dioceses. The lack of response to the suffering of the victim-survivors by some bishops and religious leaders, even to the point of rejecting them and covering them up to protect the perpetrators and the Church, *has left a deep wound in the relationship with those we are sent to serve.*

All of this is both deeply offensive and disturbing.

In solidarity with Pope Francis and my fellow bishops, I want to express my deep sorrow for the hurt and the damage that has been caused to the victim-survivors of such abuse.

Nothing that I can say will ever be adequate or mitigate this hurt and damage. But I am truly sorry that you have been made to carry this burden simply because of the failures of some of our clergy and lay people.

Together with the other bishops of England and Wales, I will always make time to listen to those who wish to speak to me about the abuse they have suffered. I have asked our Diocesan Co-Ordinator for Safeguarding to help me facilitate this.

I know also that these revelations will have tested the faith and trust of so many people. That includes the vast majority of our committed lay faithful and also our deacons, priests and bishops who serve so faithfully in their ministry and who feel *discredited and dishonoured by the shameful conduct of some of their confreres*.

I know that you all carry the failures of your fellow Catholics and your colleagues with a heavy heart. Please be assured of my heartfelt concern and prayers for you all. I also ask you for *your* prayers at this challenging time.

I wish also to assure you that since 2001, the Catholic Church in England and Wales has adopted robust procedures in order to begin to rebuild that trust which has been lost. We can have confidence in these procedures. They are found in every Diocese and parish.

The bishops no longer oversee safeguarding matters.

Every Diocese has a Diocesan Safeguarding Co-Ordinator together with an independent safeguarding Commission and any suspected criminal behaviour is immediately reported to the statutory authorities.

Every parish has a safeguarding representative to check that all those who work in any way with the young and vulnerable are able to do so.

I want to express my gratitude to our Diocesan Safeguarding Co-Ordinator, Mick Thurley, to the members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Commission and to all those who work as safeguarding representatives in our Diocese to make sure that our parishes, our communities and our schools are safe places for all and especially the most vulnerable.

Lent is a moment when we are called to *Return to the Lord with all your hearts.*

If our faith and trust is to be restored and if the Church is truly to be seen as the Body of Christ here on earth, then that is exactly what we must do - we must return to our roots – return to Christ – back to the One who alone is able to renew us all from within.

That means turning to our Crucified Saviour first in deep repentance and then re-fixing our gaze upon him. There is no other way in which the Body of Christ and each of its members will or can be renewed in the life of mission and love to which we are all called.

May this Lent be a time of deep repentance and a returning to the Lord.

**Be assured of my prayers and good wishes,
Yours devotedly in Christ,**

+ 

**The Right Revd Alan S Hopes
Bishop of East Anglia**