

The recent ISI report on the school suggested that "The commitment to trust within the community and to St Benedict's rule of love and forgiveness appears on occasion to have overshadowed responsibility for children's welfare". I am not certain what passage of the Rule the Inspector had in mind when he wrote that, but my guess is that he believed that the decision to allow Father David to return to the monastery was, indeed, a case of a misguided desire to exercise forgiveness.

I want to say something about forgiveness, because confusion about forgiveness could too easily confuse the community's attitude towards Father David and its attitude towards the victims of abuse. Cumberlege said, "we are only too aware of the pressure sometimes placed on those who have suffered abuse to forgive those who have abused them. This is unhelpful for several reasons. First the victim may not yet have reached the stage where he or she is able to forgive. Secondly forgiveness given under pressure may do considerably more to perpetuate the harm suffered by the victim. Thirdly, the perpetrator may not be ready to accept the consequences of forgiveness, which must necessarily include acceptance of the wrong that has been done and will often include a readiness to accept treatment and both criminal and canonical penalties."<sup>5</sup>

It has been suggested to us that members of the community may sometimes have given the impression that the victims were responsible for Father David's situation. They may even have seemed to show more sympathy for Father David than for his victims. We are sure this would be a result of lack of understanding rather than anything worse, but it is very important to be absolutely clear: there is never any excuse for the sexual abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults. No member of the community may say or imply, either inside the community or when speaking to outsiders, that any victim who pressed charges against Father David has done wrong. This is so important that it will be the subject of an Act of Visitation, which means that it binds in virtue of the vow of obedience. Furthermore, while we are pleased that members of the community are in contact with Father David, it will be very unhelpful to his own state to let him think that we make light in any way of his crimes.

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<sup>5</sup> *Safeguarding with confidence*, 5,21