

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND SETTINGS

Written submissions on behalf of Lisa Oakley

1. This short written submission follows the hearings in which the panel heard evidence relating to independent Christian organisations and those working with them to improve safeguarding. The issues have been extensively canvassed in witness statements and in oral evidence; we do not repeat detail already set out, but simply highlight certain key points, and Dr Oakley's submission as to the inquiry's recommendations.
2. Some of the witnesses expressed concern that any state mandation and enforcement of safeguarding activities would necessarily erode religious freedom. Dr Oakley disputes this view, and considers that it undermines the great deal of positive work being done improve safeguarding in Christian and some other religious settings.
3. In his closing speech to the inquiry Justin Humphreys stated: "In calling specifically for changes to law and its supporting provisions, we strongly support the need for further independent oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements in a wider range of settings. To be clear, this is not the registration and regulation of religious and faith groups per se. It is a broader, more encompassing regime in which faith settings may be included. One in which such specified activities taking place within religious and faith groups are no longer seen to be outside of the arrangements expected of other settings providing the same type of activities. Calls that such measures would restrict religious freedoms are erroneous and only serve to further erode the rights of children to freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse and the safeguards that they should rightly expect in all settings with which they become involved. If any group or setting is to undertake care, training or supervision of children, it should do so to the best of its ability and accept both the standards and scrutiny that might be applied to such an important aspect of children's lives".

4. Dr Oakley endorses Mr Humphrey's view and urges the inquiry not to be influenced by misconceived claims that better protection of children involves diminution of religious freedom: it does not.
5. Dr Oakley joins with other core participants represented by Slater & Gordon in urging the inquiry to recommend:
 - A new register of religious organisations and settings and those within them undertaking activities involving children
 - An expanded definition of regulated activities to capture the full range of activities involving children being carried out in religious organisations and settings
 - Mandatory reporting of knowledge and reasonable suspicion of abuse
 - A new set of common safeguarding standards and procedures across religious organisations and settings
 - A new independent body with legal powers to audit compliance with those standards, and to enforce compliance
6. The need for the reforms listed above is apparent from the evidence. In supporting those recommendations, Dr Oakley wishes to highlight three points in particular:
7. As set out in oral submissions, mandatory reporting can sometimes be falsely portrayed as a stick by which the law enforces compliance and 'punishes' those who fail to report. But it is better viewed as a *refuge* for those within regulated activities who often face implicit and explicit pressures not to report – pressures of loyalty to friends, to colleagues, to community and to the institution. Mandatory reporting gives people the ability to say "I have to do this" and in that way it provides a rationale for reporting which escapes the pressures against reporting abuse that inquiry hearings have demonstrated arise all the time. Indeed, it is essential for the development of good working practices that positive discourses and messages about mandated reporting and independent oversight are shared, if they are to be effectively endorsed and implemented in faith contexts.
8. The need for any new oversight body to be faith literate. Whilst any new oversight body cannot be captured by the interests it seeks to regulate, faith literacy is essential for effective regulation. Indeed, Dr Oakley would strongly argue that the development of such a body will only be effective if it seeks to develop some degree of partnership and respectful relations with, faith organisations

9. The importance of highlighting *good practice* as well as bad. Much of the public debate around abuse in religious settings has focussed on bad practice or worse: criminality and cover ups. The exposure of abuse is absolutely essential and should rightly be reported. However, solely negative media portrayal of religious settings can have the effect of disincentivising and demoralising the many people in churches and other places of worship who care about child welfare and positive change. That is why highlighting positive change, and the good work of organisations such as Thirtyone:eight, the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church, is essential in providing others with templates for successful reform. Capturing best practice provides models of good practice but also facilitates more positive partnership working between agencies.

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