

Witness Name: Robert Fyffe
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits: 3

Dated: 2nd October 2019

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Robert Fyffe

I, Robert Fyffe , will say as follows:-

1. I am Robert (Bob) Fyffe, General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, often referred to as CTBI. CTBI is the successor body to the British Council of Churches which was disbanded in 1990 and the new body formed immediately after in a broader restructuring that included four national bodies. Churches Together in England, Acton of Churches Together in Scotland, Cytun in Wales, and the Irish Council of Churches covering the whole of Ireland.
2. The membership of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is derived from the membership of the four national ecumenical bodies. Churches are not able to be a member of CTBI unless they are also members of at least one of the national bodies. Today the number of churches that are in membership of CTBI amounts to some 44 churches, and these are spread out across the four nations of the British Isles. The full membership list can be found at www.ctbi.or.uk.
3. Our Statement of Purpose says ; - Churches Together in Britain and Ireland believe that Ecumenism is an urgent evangelical imperative. It is time we cease projecting the image of a dismembered Body of Christ, which is a counter-witness to the Good News we proclaim. The ecumenism we seek is dynamic and responsive, not a monolith resulting from one powerful church swallowing the others but a mega community composed of churches (local, national and international) that complement one another, each with its own historical identity, its unique tradition, its own doctrinal emphasis, and its particular worship form; in short, a Pentecostal communion of communities that understand and speak one another's language.
4. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is the ecumenical body that serves churches across the four nations of the British Isles. CTBI seeks serve the churches by working in collaboration with the four national ecumenical bodies. It seeks to have a programme of common work that is common to most of its membership, this would include work around interreligious issues, faith and order issues, racial justice, migration and international issues. It would also include the development of materials for worship and spirituality, and these are produced on an annual basis.

5. One of the ways that CTBI serves the churches is by taking a leading role in aspects of interreligious work this is especially true in terms of Christian Jewish dialogue and Christian Muslim dialogue. We are also a member body of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) along with a number of our member churches.
6. The kind of work undertaken on an inter-faith basis would find a focus especially around international issues such as the conflict in Israel Palestine. We run on an annual basis, a program called Invest in Peace, jointly sponsored by the Board of British Jews. These programs bring congregations together to consider how conflict resolution can be taken forward. They are strictly adult conversations and there are no child related programs attached to any of the programs that see CTBI is partnering in.
7. There are currently no proposals to develop any programs or materials that include children, or any activities that include children. Subsequently there are no plans to take forward any training relating directly or indirectly to child protection issues.
8. The current programme of work undertaken by CTBI has no child focused work attached at all. Indeed CTBI has had no child focused work for many years. Historically, the work has focused almost entirely on adult related programs and resources.
9. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland staff would never have direct contact with children or children's programs and therefore there is at the present time, no specific child protection clearances needed for any of the staff within our organisation.
10. Over the years it has been made clear to us that child protection issues remains an issue that is dealt with almost always, within the context of each member church alone. We have not been asked in the last 15 to 20 years to undertake any work relating to child protection issues. This follows work produced by a group within CTBI about child protection and survivor stories called Time for Action. This was produced around the time of the new millennium and marked the end of our engagement with the issue. The IICSA Enquiry has copies of the publication previously provided. It was clear at that time and made clear in subsequent conversations that member churches expected to undertake their own programmes of training and resourcing child protection issues and that this would not be undertaken on an ecumenical basis by any third party organisation under the auspices of CTBI. This remains the case until today. I am attaching files that specifically illustrate the manner in which the Time For Action publication was set up and the terms of reference for the study publication. The Enquiry has already been supplied with copies of the publication Time For Action in hard copy and I am unaware of any electronic copy that still exists.
11. As such there are no programs or resources being planned by the staff of CTBI. Any engagement with guidelines for vetting or any other activity related to safeguarding is out with the experience and expertise of our current staff group. We do of course follow the developing tragic story of the churches engagement around safeguarding and its response to child abuse.
12. Through our trustee body CTBI seeks to serve the churches by discerning what work should and can be undertaken. Issues around the production of training materials policies and qualifications regarding safeguarding of children within the church has not been a topic of discussion or concern for a number of years. These issues are seen as belonging almost exclusively to the church programs and staff within member churches who are dealing with these issues. If we were to be asked to begin to engage with these issues we would require new staff and additional capacity to undertake this work with any degree of skill and professionalism required to deliver it appropriately.

13. Again there has been no discussion amongst the board of trustees within CTBI regarding any involvement or support of those who are survivors of church sexual abuse.
14. Within the CTBI network of churches and groups there is however one group that is worth highlighting. The group is called the Children's Ministry Network (CMN). The network has its own website and can be found at www.childrensministrynetwork.org.uk. This network of children's ministry leaders has over the years placed itself under the banner of the four nations ecumenical body CTBI. It has however, operated entirely independently of any CTBI governance except for the provision of financial oversights of its bank account. Visiting the CMN website makes it clear that the group has its own executive committee and operates its own separate programme. However the purpose of the Children's Ministry Network is to provide an opportunity for sharing of best practice around the development of faith programs. It is clear from the list of membership of CMN that the work undertaken around child protection is undertaken by each of those member churches individually. There has never been a call for that informal network to take on any aspect of child protection or engagement with survivors of sexual abuse. It would be my considered opinion that if an informal network such as CMN were to be approached to undertake any of that work it might prove too much for an organisation that only meets once or twice a year for a conference. It would more than likely see the closure of the network.
15. One of the areas of discussion within the CTBI staff is how any of the remaining informal networks can be made to be more accountable to the Board of Trustees of CTBI if they are to remain informal networks. This consideration would certainly include any engagement around child protection issues.
16. The extent to which I am able to comment on whether other organisations or indeed member churches are fulfilling their obligations with regard to child protection issues child protection and safeguarding training and the support of those who have been sexually abused over the last number of years, is something that I feel ill-equipped to pass comment on. To make such comments would require that I had some engagement and knowledge do in relation to child safeguarding. Unfortunately, this is not the case.
17. I am sorry that so much of what I am saying does not provide any constructive way forward in dealing with safeguarding issues or indeed the support of survivors of sexual abuse. If any such requests for support and development of programme were to be received by us we would of course seek to develop the expertise and resources needed. I do however, believe that those resources exist elsewhere and that it is appropriate for them to be developed and shared from their current contexts, which is normally within churches themselves.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

DPA

Signed: _____

2nd October 2019

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1

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EXHIBIT [] / 1



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