

**THE URC PAST CASE REVIEW PROCESS  
A TIME TO ACKNOWLEDGE PAST ABUSES, SHOW CHRISTIAN LOVE  
AND BUILD A STRONGER, SAFER CHURCH COMMUNITY**

The United Reformed Church has set up a **Past Case Review** and is now inviting anyone with concerns about the behaviour or conduct of anyone affiliated with the URC since its formation in 1972 to raise them formally.

**Why is this happening and what does it mean for us?**

**There is the highest level of public and political concern about past failings in the behaviour of national bodies which have resulted in past abuses being ignored or covered up.** A number of high profile cases involved national figures in positions of authority or influence who were found guilty of abusing their power, authority or celebrity status (such as Jimmy Saville and Rolf Harris), in particular involving the abuse of women and young people.

**The churches have recognised that they have ignored evidence about past abuses.** Some church leaders have been found guilty, including a Scottish Cardinal and a former Anglican Bishop of Lewes. The Pope has said that abuse of children was like "leprosy" infecting the Church, according to the Italian La Repubblica newspaper. Pope Francis has strengthened the Vatican's laws against child abuse and has sought forgiveness from the victims of sexual abuse by priests. Sadly, there have also been a few cases within the URC.

**Concern about abuse is now widespread around the world and several countries have established public enquiries.** The UK government's *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* is investigating a wide range of institutions including local authorities, the police, the armed forces, schools, churches and mosques to consider the extent to which State and non-State institutions have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation; to consider the steps which it is necessary for State and non-State institutions to take in order to protect children from such abuse in future; and to publish a report with recommendations.

**All the UK churches are reviewing their own files and past practices concerning all forms of abuse.** A consistent finding is that mistreatment is usually associated with abuse of power by people exercising authority. Examining these cases has therefore inevitably led churches to explore the ways in which power is used and abused within the church and, in particular, the concept of spiritual abuse, meaning the use of spiritual authority or The Bible by an ordained or lay church leader to coerce, intimidate or ill-treat people, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually.

**The URC has established a formal process to receive, evaluate and respond to any allegations involving ordained ministers and also lay church leaders.** All churches are being asked to draw this to the attention of congregations. A brochure (explaining the process in detail) and a poster are available ([www.urch.org.uk/past-case-review](http://www.urch.org.uk/past-case-review)). A team of independent people will respond to the allegations and provide support to all involved.

## What happens next?

**Past and present members of local congregations are now being given the opportunity to raise any concerns about past physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse.** If a disclosure is made in a local church context, the person who wishes to disclose will be put in touch with the Past Case Review team. There will be no pressure on people to disclose, but should they want to, there is a clear process in place which has been authorised by General Assembly.

If an issue of concern about past abuse is raised in a particular local congregation, this can provoke strong emotional reactions and upset. If it becomes public, there may be contrary opinions, shock, outrage, denial and deep hurt. We trust that God will guide us and grant us wisdom, sensitivity and open minds as it progresses.

**Anybody from our church who wishes to talk over a concern can speak with the Minister, their Elder or Safeguarding lead.** You can also contact the Past Case Review team direct, no matter who you are or what your question, by sending an email to [pastcase.review@urc.org.uk](mailto:pastcase.review@urc.org.uk) .

**The URC and our own local church aim to be an open, respectful and trusted community, guided by Christian love and respecting the humanity of all involved.** We know this does not work perfectly; people do get hurt in churches and serious abuse does happen. This process enables us to hear and respond to deep hurts, which may have been nursed for many years. The process of talking, listening respecting and apologising can be healing and should help us to be stronger communities.

The website is full of information and resources, including a wide range of counselling services: [www.urc.org.uk/images/PCR/PCR-docs/Past-Case-Review-Brochure-10-09-2016.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/PCR/PCR-docs/Past-Case-Review-Brochure-10-09-2016.pdf).

We pray that as the process works its way through, we will see the love of God at work, that our churches will become safer spaces for worship and fellowship, and that we will be able to care for each other in Christian respect and compassion.

With thanks to David N Jones, Elder, Abington Avenue URC - 822 words (excluding titles, etc)