# Safeguarding in Faith Communities

**Justin Humphreys**

Chief Executive and Head of Safeguarding Development

Thirtyone:eight (Secretariat to the APPG)

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# What is the All Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Communities?

- The APPG is an informal, cross-party interest group of MPs and Peers focusing on the particular issues of safeguarding legislation, policy and practice and their relationship to faith contexts.
- The group exists to help other MPs and Peers from all parties become better informed about this particular policy area.
- A focus upon understanding both the opportunity and responsibility of faith communities in safeguarding vulnerable groups.

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# Past and Present Work of the APPG

- Research and lobbying to change the law on ‘Positions of Trust’ (currently within the Sexual Offences Act, 2003)
  - Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, 2021 – awaiting royal assent.
    - Faith Leaders (and others such as Sports Coaches) are to be included within new definitions and provisions to safeguard 16-18 year olds.

- Research and Knowledge Mapping regarding the effectiveness of working relationships between faith communities and statutory partners.

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# A Disconnect between partners?

‘Christian churches and [statutory] social service providers are committed to the care of children and families; however, there has been a historic disconnect between the two institutions concerning child abuse prevention efforts. All too often, criticisms and mistrust tend to characterize the way in which the two interact.’

**Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect through Church and Social Service Collaboration**

Social Work & Christianity, Vol 37. Number 4. pp381-416 (2010)

Erin Olson O’Neill, Jodi Gabel, Stephanie Huckins, and Jeanette Harder

thirtyone: eight

appg all-party parliamentary group Safeguarding in faith communities

# What do we know: evidence and context?

- **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**
  - Investigation into Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings (**2021**)
  - Investigation into the Anglican Church (**2020**)
  - Investigation into the Roman Catholic Church (**2020**)
- **Previous Research**
  - **Safeguarding Children who are Exposed to Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief** (L. Oakley, J. Humphreys & K. Kinmond, **2019**)
  - **Understanding Spiritual Abuse in Christian Communities** (L. Oakley & J. Humphreys, **2018**)
  - **Practitioner and communities' awareness of Child abuse linked to faith or belief** (L. Oakley, J. Humphreys & K. Kinmond, **2017**)
  - **Exploring the complexities of understanding vulnerability and adult safeguarding within Christian faith organisations** (J. Humphreys, L. Oakley, L. Fenge & S. Bass, **2016**)

thirtyone: eight

appg all-party parliamentary group Safeguarding in faith communities

# Is there room for Optimism?

‘Although churches and [statutory] service providers often utilize different means, their goals significantly overlap and the rift between the religious and the secular is perhaps less insurmountable than originally believed. Further, participants stated that collaborative relationships would be mutually beneficial.’

**Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect through Church and Social Service Collaboration**

Social Work & Christianity, Vol 37. Number 4. pp381-416 (2010)

Erin Olson O’Neill, Jodi Gabel, Stephanie Huckins, and Jeanette Harder

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# Abuse in Religious Settings Research Project

## (Consortium led by University of Kent undertaking 7 separate studies)

**Q1:** How do the organisational structures and cultures of religious organisations, groups and communities intersect with abuse?

**Q2** How is abuse and safeguarding in religious contexts addressed in public policy in different national contexts, and how can more effective understanding and working relationships be built between safeguarding professionals working for statutory bodies and those responsible for safeguarding in religious organisations?

**Q3** What is distinctive about abuse in religious contexts and what constitutes effective responses to it?

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# Study 5: Religion, abuse, public policy and professional practice (led by thirtyone:eight)

An empirical study of perceptions and experiences of safeguarding professionals in statutory bodies and those with safeguarding responsibilities in religious organisations in relation to their work with each other. Interviewees' perceptions of the wider policy trend towards stronger independent oversight of safeguarding in religious organisations will also be examined.

- Semi-structured interviews (n=12) to inform the design of an online survey questionnaire distributed to safeguarding officers in statutory and religious organisations in the UK (n = c.800).
- Analysis of the survey results will inform the design of a second-wave of semi-structured interviews (n=24) to examine specific emerging findings in greater depth.

thirtyone: eight

appg all-party parliamentary group Safeguarding in faith communities

# Key Challenges for Faith Settings

- Huge diversity and disparity in awareness, understanding and practice across the faith community.
- Mistrust and misunderstanding between communities and statutory partners.
- Use of sacred texts and religious/cultural practices that legitimise or facilitate abuse.
- Limited scrutiny exacerbated by arguments relating to infringement upon religious freedoms.
- Fear of the consequences of past/non-recent/historic failures.

thirtyone: eight

appg all-party parliamentary group Safeguarding in faith communities

# Opportunity and Responsibility

- Faith settings have unparalleled access to children within the context of their families.
- Faith communities and faith-based organisations mobilise extensive social welfare efforts where others fail to gain traction (hard to reach).
- The responsibility to become active participants in the safeguarding of children in ways that uphold best practice standards is not yet consistently understood or achieved.
- Examples of good practice often become over-shadowed by failures and consequent public perception.

thirtyone: eight

appg

all-party parliamentary group
Safeguarding in faith communities

# Please get in touch

If you would like to know more about the work of the APPG or to potentially participate in this research study, please get in touch as below:

**Thirtyone:eight**
PO Box 133,
Swanley, Kent. BR8 7UQ

Tel: 0303 003 11 11
Email: info@thirtyoneeight.org

Web: www.thirtyoneeight.org/about-us/all-party-parliamentary-group

thirtyone: eight

appg all-party parliamentary group Safeguarding in faith communities