



Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission

Report to the Anglican Consultative Council in February 2023 (ACC-18)

1. Terms of reference

The Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission (the Commission) is an international body which was established at the request of the Anglican Consultative Council at its meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, in 2016 (ACC-16). Its function has been to promote the safety of people within churches of the Anglican Communion – with a particular focus on children, young people and vulnerable adults. This function primarily relates to the Third Mark of Mission (to respond to human need by loving service) and the Fourth Mark of Mission (to seek to transform unjust structures of society and to challenge violence of every kind).

During the first phase of its work, from 2017 to 2019, the Commission identified safeguarding policies and procedures already in place within the Anglican Communion and developed safeguarding guidelines for implementation by each province. The guidelines were approved by the Anglican Consultative Council in Hong Kong in 2019 (ACC-17) and are available in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Portuguese for Brazil, English, Korean and Japanese.

The Commission was reconstituted at the request of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-17), and in May 2019 the Standing Committee approved its terms of reference. As noted in its report to ACC-17, in the second phase of its work until ACC-19 'The principal function of the Commission will be to be an advisory body for the effective implementation of the guidelines in the provinces through the development of resources, training and liaison with provincial representatives.'

2. Membership

The Commission's terms of reference provide for a membership of 17 persons and up to 2 co-opted persons with recognised competence in safe church/safeguarding practices from different regions with a gender and clergy/laity balance. There are currently 17 members.

The Commission has greatly appreciated the supported Mandy Marshall, the Director of Gender Justice, and Kim Barker as a part-time consultant.

3. Activities since ACC-17

The Commission has met in person twice since ACC-17: in October 2019 in London and in May 2022 in Jordan. The Commission has had a monthly online meeting and a 3-day online meeting in February 2022. These online meetings have been a vital way of building the team, progressing the work and keeping in touch during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several Commission members participated in the Lambeth Conference in July-August 2022.

At its October 2019 meeting, the focus was on preparation for the Lambeth Conference in July-August 2020. At its May 2022 meeting, the focus was again on preparation for the upcoming Lambeth Conference. Further, following consultation with Bishop Tim Thornton, the Bishop at Lambeth, it was decided to recommend the amendment of the definition of "vulnerable adult" in the guidelines to express the essence of vulnerability of an adult as arising from the capacity for exploitation by a church worker where there is an intrinsic imbalance of power in their relationship.

The Commission's participation at the Lambeth Conference highlighted the importance of safeguarding in the life of the Anglican Communion. The Commission led a plenary session 'How can our churches become spaces where everyone is safe?', a seminar session 'Providing support where there is abuse' on three occasions, and engaged actively in the Resource Centre. Through this engagement many bishops requested the Commission to provide resources to commence implementing safeguarding policies and practices. The Commission also drafted the Lambeth Call on Safe Church, which was approved in principle by the bishops, and includes a call to the Instruments of Communion, to make the safety of all persons in the provinces of the Anglican Communion a priority of their focus, resource allocation and actions.

4. Future activities

The Commission is currently developing the following resources:

- A Quick Start Guide: This resource aims to provide initial guidance to provinces and dioceses who are beginning to implement safe church policies and practices.

- **Audio Visuals:** This resource, which comprises a series of six audio-visual films (in English, and with subtitles in French, Spanish and Portuguese), will further explain some of the key issues raised in the guidelines and assist in applying the guidelines in different contexts. The first film 'Introduction to Safe Church' provides an overview of the guidelines. This film together with the Commission's plenary session at the Lambeth Conference can be accessed on the Commission's webpage on the Anglican Communion Office's website.
- **Training Materials:** At the request of provincial representatives surveyed, the Commission is developing training materials to be used in provinces, dioceses and parishes to support the development and implementation of safe church policies and practices.

Planning is underway for in person meetings in the UK in March 2023 and Zimbabwe in October 2023. Provincial representatives have been invited to the meeting in Zimbabwe at which there will be a review of the resources developed and a focus on the theology of safeguarding with contributions from Africa.

Recently the Commission had an initial discussion with Roman Catholic representatives to explore the feasibility of a joint meeting with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2024.

5. Recommendations

The Commission requests the Anglican Consultative Council to pass the following motions:

Recognising the priority of building a safe church through the Anglican Communion, the Anglican Consultative Council:

1. commits itself to making the safety of all persons in the provinces of the Anglican Communion a priority of its focus, resource allocation and actions;
2. requests the Safe Church Commission to continue to provide safeguarding resources and training to the provinces; and
3. amends the definition of "vulnerable adult" in the Guidelines to enhance the safety of all persons – especially children, young people and vulnerable adults – within the provinces of the Anglican Communion in the manner set out in the Schedule.

Garth Blake, Chair

9 January 2023

Schedule

Schedule 1 entitled Definitions is amended by deleting the definition of “vulnerable adult”:

vulnerable adult means an adult who by reason of an intellectual disability, mental illness or other impairment, age or other circumstance, has reduced capacity, whether permanently or temporarily, to protect themselves from abuse. This includes any adult who:

- is ministered to in their home;
- is dependent on one or more persons for support such as in the case of an accident, illness or birth of a child;
- experiences a life crisis or natural disaster, such as the death of a family member or loss of employment, or loss of home and possessions; and
- through poverty, war or civil strife, displacement, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender, or other social and cultural factors has a diminished ability to protect themselves from abuse.

and substituting the following definition of “vulnerable adult”:

vulnerable adult means an adult who has any relationship with a church worker where there is an intrinsic imbalance of power, which is capable of being exploited or taken advantage of by the church worker to the detriment of the adult. The imbalance of power may be increased by the circumstances of the adult such as where they:

- are ministered to in their home;
- are dependent on one or more persons for support such as in the case of an accident, illness or birth of a child;
- experience a life crisis or natural disaster, such as the death of a family member or loss of employment, or loss of home and possessions;
- through poverty, war or civil strife, displacement, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender, or other social and cultural factors have a diminished ability to protect themselves from abuse; and
- have an intellectual or physical disability, mental illness or other impairment.