

## Towards a Vulnerable Adults Policy

### Introduction

Christian communities should be places where all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse. The Church, following the ministry of Jesus Himself, is particularly called by God to support those at the margins, those less powerful or those without a voice in our community. The pastoral care offered by the church should reflect the example of Christ, giving full respect to all who receive it.

In recent years society as a whole has become more aware of the extent of the harm often experienced by [often done to] vulnerable adults. In response to this Parliament passed the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Department of Health published 'No Secrets', a document giving guidance on developing and implementing inter-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults. This guidance provides a framework for the protection of vulnerable adults including Local Authority recommended structures for the investigation of allegations of abuse. .

The Church as a voluntary organisation also needs to develop similar guidance since through its work it is in regular contact with vulnerable adults. In 2006 the Church of England issued 'Creating a Safe Church', a policy and guidance for the protection of adults in the Church of England.

The Church in its caring role, should at least match the secular world in which it is set. In adopting this policy, based as it is on 'No Secrets' and 'Creating a Safe Church', the Diocese of Newcastle emphasises that such care and respect must be particularly exercised in relation to those who are vulnerable in our communities.

### Summary of the Policy

- We are committed to the safeguarding and protection of vulnerable adults within the church community
- We are committed to respectful pastoral ministry to all adults within our church community
- We will carefully select and train all those with any pastoral responsibility within the church including the use of CRB disclosures where legal and/or appropriate
- We will respond without delay to any complaint made that a vulnerable adult for whom we are responsible has been harmed, cooperating with the police and statutory services in any investigation
- We will seek to offer informed pastoral care to any adult who has suffered abuse.
- We will challenge any abuse of power and control by anyone in a position of trust or authority
- We will care for and supervise any member of our church community known to have offended against a vulnerable adult.

## Definitions

A vulnerable adult is anyone who is or may be in need of Community Care Services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. (*No Secrets*) This will include -

- Sensory or physical disability or impairment
- A learning disability
- A physical illness
- A mental illness (including dementia) , chronic or otherwise
- An addiction to alcohol or drugs
- The failing faculties of old age
- A permanent or temporary reduction in physical, mental or emotional capacity brought about by life events e.g. bereavement or previous abuse or trauma.

**Mistreatment** is defined as ‘...a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons’ (*No Secrets*). It is any misuse of a pastoral or managerial relationship, from the most serious to less severe behaviour, which lies at its root. It covers **abuse**, bullying and harassment. These categories are not watertight and can merge into one another. **Harm** is what results from mistreatment or abuse and is ‘significant’ if it effects quality of life on a short or longer term basis.

## Policy Statement

The Church of England is committed to encouraging an environment where those adults who may be vulnerable for any reason are able to worship and pursue their faith journey in safety. All adults whether they see themselves as vulnerable or not will receive respectful pastoral ministry recognising the power imbalance in any pastoral situation.

All church workers involved in any pastoral ministry will be recruited with care including the use of the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure service when legal and/or appropriate. They will receive training and continuing support.

All complaints that an adult has been mistreated will be responded to without delay. If the matter involves the church there will be co-operation with the police and adult social services in any investigation.

Sensitive and informed pastoral care will be offered to any adult who has suffered abuse including support to make a complaint if wished and help to find appropriate specialist care either from the church or secular agencies.

## Implementing the policy - Principles

The church can work towards creating a safe and non-discriminatory environment by being aware of some of the special needs of vulnerable people. Issues to be considered include both the physical surroundings and the attitudes of workers. Vulnerable adults have the right to –

- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Privacy
- Lead as independent a life as is practicable and to be enabled to do so
- Be able to choose how to lead their lives including the management of their money and their legal rights to independent living
- The protection of the law
- Have their rights upheld regardless of their ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, impairment or disability, age, religious or cultural background
- Their chosen language or method of communication

### Implementing the policy – practice

The Diocese of Newcastle will seek to implement the checklist/guidance contained in 'No Secrets' for those with responsibility for the provision of services to vulnerable adults. In particular we will seek to

- Work in a non-abusive way that respects the rights of individuals to enjoy privacy, dignity, independence and choice
- Actively promote the empowerment and well being of vulnerable people through the services we provide
- Ensure rigorous recruitment practices deter those who actively seek vulnerable people to exploit or abuse. This will include the taking up of references and CRB checks.
- Actively promote an organisational culture within which all those who express concern will be treated seriously and will receive a positive response from church leadership
- Ensure that church staff and volunteers understand that vulnerable people can be abused and that they know what to do if they think that someone is being abused. This will include referral to and active cooperation with statutory services in line with their protocols.
- Ensure that all paid staff and volunteers receive appropriate training and support
- Develop and implement good practice which may include –
  - Have an internal policy, procedure and guidance on how allegations of abuse will be dealt with, including allegations against their own organisation's staff and volunteers. Ensure that the procedure links to the local interagency procedure.
  - Work in cooperation with local Adult Services and the Police when they are investigating an allegation of abuse
  - Identify a lead officer who takes responsibility for training staff and volunteers and updating procedures.
  - Ensure that confidentiality and information sharing related to the protection of vulnerable adults and perpetrators of abuse in a multi agency context are maintained through agreed protocols.

### Implementing the policy - Next steps

That the Archdeacon of Northumberland acts as lead officer in this matter and works with a small task group to implement this policy

Geoff Miller, January 2008

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