**Text by one of the nine people who participated in the Diocese of Leicester Past Cases Review 2**

**The following was written (anonymously) for media publication by one of those who came forward to speak with Independent Reviewers about their experience of how church related abuse was handled.**

**My background**

* I’m a priest in the Church of England in the East Midlands.

**What happened**

* When I was training to be a vicar, several years ago, I experienced inappropriate sexual advances by an influential clergy man. These were under the guide of helping me to ‘pray and discern my vocation’ and were neither welcomed nor invited. At the time I was very shaken and felt violated both physically and spiritually.
* A friend was with me at the same event. She didn’t witness the incident but saw the effect it had on me and supported my subsequent disclosure, and then my application to bring a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure.

* I was wrongly advised at the time it might impact my career as a priest if I said anything. I was just starting out - my whole vocation might be questioned if I reported it. Later, when I was a curate, I didn’t want to be labelled a troublemaker.
* I learned to live with it and chose to forgive him and move on. I’d not been raped - it could have been worse - that’s how I rationalised it in my mind.
* However, the more safeguarding training I undertook the more I realised he had abused me, and abused his position of power over me.
* I began to think - if he’s done it to me - chances are I won’t be the only one. If he ever was in a church setting, I’d need to say something… I guess my ‘mum instinct’ kicked in I’d imagine if it was my daughter. That then made me put aside my own reticence and be professional and consider the need to safeguard other women. So, I disclosed what he had done.
* I had excellent support from the Diocese of Leicestershire safeguarding team, can’t fault them in any way. However, because it had happened so many years ago, and I had not felt able to report it before, I was advised that the first stage in dealing with it, was to bring a ‘complaint out of time’ under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure against him.
* I felt it important that that abusive priest be held to account so that he realised how wrong he’s been and to stop him doing anything like it again. I didn’t feel vindictive - I guess I thought he might not understand how toxic his behaviour had been. I know that abusers are often victims themselves…
* However, the bureaucracy I encountered was harder to deal with than the initial abuse I’d experienced.
* The process took many months and each stage was painful, drawn out and felt heartless. Again - I speak of the institutional process rather than the local diocesan support I had.
* At the end of it all, I received a letter one day in the post. I opened it not knowing what it was and in shock read that ‘*my application to bring a complaint out of time had been denied*. *My application was dismissed and I was unable to make a complaint’*. Three short lines in a letter that ended many years of grappling with the experience, and then attempting to do what I’d been trained to do – challenge abusive behaviour.
* That letter felt like a massive slap in the face. I was devastated. I was alone in my house when I read it.

They justified this response in an accompanying report saying the man ‘simply denied the incident’ and that ‘I was not vulnerable at the time’ and ‘should have made a complaint before’.

* I should have been told in person by someone who could support me in that dreadful moment. And the reasons for dismissing it felt so ridiculous it was unreal.
* There were times when I had to revisit the place where it happened and each time I experienced physical symptoms of trauma. I was later told by a counsellor that I had symptoms of PTSD – I believe they were largely relating to the church process as much as the initial abuse.
* I’d been supported to raise the case because we are trained to challenge abusive behaviour – however when I did it was the institutional machine of the Church of England that caused me more pain than the original abuse. The system when you report abuse felt more abusive than the actual incident that happened to me.
* I had to live with that ‘application for complaint’ process for months - hiding it from my parishioners and friends. In order, to report it, I’d had to also re-live the original incident to be sure I’d got every fact correct. When the powers that be in the ‘institution’ made their judgement it became ever harder to live with. I’d been abused twice. I also discovered later in the process that I was not the only one who felt abused by this man.
* The emotional energy of living with that failed attempt was just too much. I felt disillusioned and isolated. Undergoing further safeguarding training with all the alerts and guidelines how to recognise and report abuse felt like another slap in the face.
* In the end I decided to leave my post and serve God the best way I could elsewhere - giving myself distance from it all. The Church had trained and invested in me and I guess they lost several years of my working life – and I retired before pensionable age which has, I guess been a personal financial sacrifice.
* I felt I needed to move right away - I’d always dreaded bumping into him. And because of the way that Clergy Discipline Measure process worked - applying to make the complaint - he knew my name - where I lived and worked. I just felt too vulnerable and never quite safe.
* My faith in God never once waivered. In fact, He was closer than ever- His love was powerfully supporting me every step of the way. And I felt that He opened up a way for me to serve Him in the life-giving way that I do now.

**The Review**

I took part in the Past Cases Review 2 (PCR2) because of what happened to me and I want to try to change things so other people didn’t have to be as traumatised as I was by the process that happens when you have reported something.

The support I had locally from the Church of England in Leicestershire was very helpful, it’s the legal system the whole church has that’s wrong. The system they have for dealing with a complaint about safeguarding matters caused me more pain than anything that abusive priest did to me.

I felt as if when working for the church I needed one of those signs which you see in NHS settings that say: “We value our people and will not tolerate them being abused.”

That’s why I took part in the PCR2 process even though it’s painful. I still feel those visceral emotions when I think of it/speak of it - but the worst of all those feelings is not because of that one priest, but the people in charge of the institution that failed when I needed it.

I want the church’s processes to be modernised and changed so they are fit for purpose. I hope the Church of England will listen and act. I want to be part of the solution having seen the problem at first hand.