

## Safeguarding Service speech — General Assembly 2022

Moderator, I would like to begin by telling you about the matriarch of my family when I was growing up, the glue that held my family together, was my great-grandmother. Born in Anderston, but living much of her life in Possil in Glasgow, Nana Gibb was five foot tall with her hands in the air. But she knew how to keep you in line.

First, you would get a look. And that was a powerful, pervasive look. And he knew it, because her second line of attack was to push her glasses firmly up her nose, as if this was going to magnify the first look. And if you spoke back, or tried to protest that you didn't do it, she would raise her finger, and utter one word, "Ah." That two-letter onomatopoeic expulsion of air translated into many things

"Don't even try it"

"Don't push me"

"Don't even think about crossing that line"

And if you were foolish enough to push it, and we all were, she would stand up and tower over you. Well, she did when I was six years old. And she would say "Haud yer wheesht son, Haud yer wheesht."

In fact, she spent most of her life alternating between two sayings, "Haud yer wheesht," and "Just you tell them, just you tell them."

My great-grandfather, who was simply known as the auld man, ruled with a reign of terror and hurt, beating her black and blue and turning on any one of his children or grandchildren if they so much as tried to help her. She was a woman who, as you've heard, said very little, but she taught us all about unconditional love, strength and hope for the future, and as she would alternate between "Haud yer wheesht" and "just you tell them," so will I.

Let me be abundantly clear, in a world where people in positions of trust have maliciously and sinfully and criminally abused and sexually assaulted young children, vulnerable adults, women and men, we cannot haud our wheesht.

And in a society where trusted leaders, and at times, too, trusted religious leaders have violated every norm, expectation and ounce of integrity when they prey on women and girls, using the pastoral tool for misconduct and abuse, assault and infidelity whilst destroying lives and congregations, we cannot haud our wheesht.

We must humbly say that this kirk, imperfect as it is, must do everything it can to robustly safeguard its people, its volunteers and those it reaches out to in Christ's name from the fear of abuse, assault or harm of any kind. We simply cannot haud our wheesht.

So let me tell you some of the things that are important to us in safeguarding this year.

In response to the 2021 deliverance to scope out a mandatory training programme for ministers, we are able to introduce the Safeguarding Learning Pathway. This was in response to a recognition that there was a gap in training for ministers, with the emphasis having been placed on training volunteers. The Pathway is set out in Appendix 1, and this tiered approach to learning is for everyone who has some responsibility for vulnerable groups within the church. It has particular expectations of ministers.

The introductory and advanced courses are already available and the leadership course is still being updated. As soon as it is live, we will inform Presbytery contacts and Clerks. We would appeal to the Assembly to take heed of our deliverance framing this as an instruction in deliverance four, to make sure that all of our ministers are appropriately trained.

To ensure that all active Ministers are brought up to date in terms of safeguarding training, we would ask you to look back to the last safeguarding training you attended. If this training was more than 3 years ago, the Learning Pathway should be started from the beginning, with Introductory Safeguarding Training being attended as soon as practicable.

In that gear change between hauding our wheesht and just telling them, the Safeguarding service recognizes the need for whistleblowing as an essential part of safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm. Whistleblowing is when someone raises a concern about wrongdoing involving a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing in their organisation. It is an important process for identifying risks to people. Individuals are allowed, by law (The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998), to make a 'protected disclosure'. This provides protection against victimisation or dismissal for workers. Currently the law does not apply to volunteers but it is good practice for charities to recognise that volunteers face many of the same challenges as paid staff when seeking to raise concerns.

The Church takes seriously any form of abuse, poor practice and fraud that may take place in the workplace and places importance on maintaining high standards of honesty, openness, integrity and accountability within our Church communities. The Church will therefore support all workers and volunteers, including temporary staff, agency staff,

contractors, and students on placement, who make a disclosure (blowing the whistle) where the disclosure is a genuine concern made in good faith.

We believe that making a whistleblowing procedure available to congregations and Presbyteries will help support people to come forward when they have a genuine concern about wrongdoing in the Church. A suitable procedure is available for download on the Law Department pages of the Resources section of the Church website.

We would hope this will enable people to feel supported and safeguarded as they raise concerns about poor practice, abuse or fraud.

Finally, the Safeguarding service is committed to ensuring a safe church for all. We all have a part to play in ensuring that this is the case, and I would like to thank all of you for your contribution in making sure that our service remains a robust safeguard against harm. Thank you.

Moderator, I present the Report of the Safeguarding Committee, and since I am not a Commissioner, I ask the Principal Clerk to move the deliverances.