

Safeguarding Training

Since I wrote to all Branch Ringing Masters and Education Officers I have had a few (actually very few) grumbles and most seem to be taking it in their stride. However the paragraphs (in italics) below from a Bath branch ringer pose some questions that you may all be pondering about. Following them is a response from Glenys Armstrong our Diocesan Safeguarding lead.

Thank you for the notification but I have to say that I object most strongly to the requirement for all ringers to have "basic awareness".

One of the best things about the culture of ringing is that, unlike most of the church's voluntary activities, it is open to everyone and anyone who wants to turn up, however casually. On an average Sunday morning at Bath Abbey, where I ring, there are often four categories of ringer present: (a) those who are members of the band, (b) those who are regular ringers but are not members of the band; (c) those who occasionally turn up but ring mostly at other towers and (d) visiting ringers from anywhere and everywhere, who just happen to be in the area. This is the case at many, if not most, of the towers in the country.

It is therefore impossible to identify a discrete group of volunteers who ring a particular church's bells. There are members of the band, of course, but there are also categories (b)-(d) as mentioned above, which makes the boundaries of "the ringers at church X" extremely fuzzy.

So if all ringers must undergo safeguarding training, where does this leave categories (b)-(d)? Will we refuse to allow anyone to ring at our tower if they haven't done the training? If visiting ringers turn up on a Sunday morning do we ask to see evidence that the training has been completed before we let them into the ringing chamber? After all, you cannot assume that their home tower would have required them to do the training (it could be non-Anglican, or secular, or foreign, or they may simply not be a member of any band).

And if the requirement for safeguarding training applies only to group (a), then what is the point? Anyone who was really a safeguarding risk could simply resign from his band and yet continue to ring exactly as before, this time as a member of group (b).

It seems to be that this is a typical example of box-ticking bureaucracy which is both pointless (for the reasons outlined above) and a manifestation of the unpleasant culture of suspicion and assumption of guilt that the excessive implementation of safeguarding measures has created.

I am sure that many ringers share this point of view and I understand that Nick Field, the Bath branch ringing master, has already contacted you with his objections. I can certainly say that I will do everything I can to oppose its imposition in the Bath branch.

And the response from Glenys:

I recognise that there may well be resistance to this. However, given the importance of ensuring that the Church – and all its premises, including bell-towers - are as safe as they

can be for all who may wish to come to it, including those children, young people and adults with any sort of vulnerability or disability who may wish to become bell ringers, we have to take the steps needed to put this into place.

This is not about accusing people in towers of wanting to harm children, but given the concern below that “Anyone who was really a safeguarding risk could simply resign from his band and yet continue to ring exactly as before, this time as a member of group (b)”, about having as many trained eyes and ears in the Church (and that includes in the Tower) as possible to ensure that someone is alert to what to look for and what steps to take should a concern come up. As for not having had to consider vulnerable adults before – we are all getting older, as is the general church population, and it seems only sensible that as we will all be vulnerable one day whether through fading sight or hearing, dementia or general ill health prevalent in old age, we put the measures in place to support and protect each other, and as Christians therefore our whole community, from harm. It’s about making a better society where no-one is left wondering what to do if they have a concern and where the church is in the forefront of standing up for those for cannot protect themselves.

This is not about refusing to allow ringers to ring if they have not completed the training. It is about making free, accessible safeguarding training accessible to everyone who volunteers for any role in the church and encouraging everyone to take it up. This is not just a local matter – it is being rolled out across the whole of the Anglican Church. The Catholic and Methodist Churches are putting into place safeguarding training for all church roles. This scheme has the backing of the Association of Ringing Teachers - <http://ringingteachers.org/news/articles/new-safeguarding-training-scheme>; and in a statement by Chris Mew, by the CCCBR. <https://cccbr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/safeguarding-children-in-towers.pdf>. Ringers from groups b, c and d below will therefore most likely be contacted by their local churches, Diocese or societies regarding training.

Please feel free to share this information above with any ringers who are concerned about the implications of safeguarding in Towers, and encourage them to commit one hour every 3 years to take the CO training, to help them protect children and other vulnerable people that they may come across in churches, in bell towers, and in our communities generally.

Barrie Hendry Safeguarding Officer