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Pastoral Letter for distribution to Congregations on Pentecost Sunday 2018

My Dear People,

I write, on behalf of all the Bishops of Scotland, to draw your attention to the publication of our Church's new Safeguarding materials which come into force on 21st May 2018. These include *'In God's Image'*, the document which offers comprehensive guidance and instruction on every aspect of Safeguarding, including compliance with new Safeguarding standards. This has been shaped by the recent experience and developing expertise of those involved in the front line of Safeguarding in the Church, both in Scotland and internationally. In ratifying this publication, the Bishops have taken the opportunity to repeat and renew apologies made to those who have suffered any form of abuse, at any time, by anyone representing the Church.

Your Bishops want you to know that we aspire to the highest standards of care and protection of all, and we are committed to rebuilding trust and confidence in the ways in which we ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe. We are most grateful to the teams of Safeguarding personnel in all Dioceses and to over 9,000 trained volunteers who support the work of parishes and religious congregations across Scotland.

The publication of these materials marks the end of a period in which the Church has been working quietly, but tirelessly, to implement the recommendations of the McLellan Commission that reported in August 2015.

Since 2013 we have published annual audits of allegations reported to us each year. Last month, we also published a historical review of non-recent cases of abuse, covering the period 1943–2005. The publication of our annual audits, the historical review and our new Safeguarding materials demonstrate our ongoing commitment to openness and transparency.

We recognise, however, that publications alone are not enough. Regular reviews and rigorous scrutiny by those both inside and outside the church will be required, as will independent evaluation.

An Independent Review Group, chaired by Baroness Helen Liddell, comprising a team of experienced and distinguished experts in safeguarding, child protection and education has overseen the implementation of the McLellan recommendations and is now examining our annual Safeguarding Audits. Each year, this autonomous group will scrutinise the work of two of the eight dioceses in Scotland alongside a review of the work of Religious Orders.

