

EDITORIAL

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The Ecclesiastical Law Society is an educational charity. The function of the Society is, principally, to promote study and learning in ecclesiastical law and, over the years since the society's foundation in 1987, this *Journal* has played its part in that. The Society has produced materials to help in the teaching of canon law, and members have used their expertise in delivering training to clergy, lay leaders and ordinands.

There is a line in probably every introductory lecture on the law of the Church which goes something like this: 'You may not think that you need to know about ecclesiastical law, but you will realise that you do when something goes wrong.' In this issue of the *Journal* the application of law in the Church at times when things have gone wrong is brought into focus. Christopher Grout explores the law surrounding the seal of the confessional and, in particular, the ability or otherwise of clergy to refuse to give evidence in court about information heard in the sacrament of reconciliation. This question is clearly defined in some jurisdictions but less so in England and Wales. The same topic is touched upon by Peter Collier QC in his exhaustive study of the development of the law on safeguarding over the last half-century. This article started life as one of the Society's Northern Province lectures (again, part of its educational offering). The harrowing and disturbing safeguarding cases to which he refers are examples of where things have gone just about as wrong as they can go. Idowu Akinloye brings a perspective on clergy discipline from Africa, and specifically from Nigeria and South Africa, showing that the need for effective disciplinary processes is strong across the world and across the spread of churches.

Things go wrong in the Church just as they do in any group or society made up of human beings. Law and ecclesiastical regulation, properly applied, can have the dual roles of, first, setting responsibilities and expectations to ensure that the aims of the Church are fulfilled and the vulnerable protected, and, second, effective means of dealing with and, where possible, putting right situations where things go wrong.