

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is not an easy subject to address. Most of us are aware of serious crimes of abuse committed by people in the public eye, including clergy and bishops. We hope that such things will stop, but we don't really want to dwell on the issue. However, we have to address it. The church has failed to do so in the past, and we must put that right.



Let's get this straight at the outset. Safeguarding and abuse are not peripheral issues that may be important, but are best hidden away and not talked about. Safeguarding is at the very heart of the Gospel. God's concern for the weak – for children and the most vulnerable – shines out of every book of the Bible, and out of the life of every saint. Keeping people safe is what the Saviour does, and we are to do it too. Abuse of people is an assault on the image of God in those he has created and loves. We must do all we can to drive that out and make it as rare as humanly possible.

So we must and will take safeguarding seriously. Every minister, lay or ordained, must undertake regular safeguarding training. Every parish must have a safeguarding officer, independent of the parish priest, to whom anyone with concerns about any situation can go. And the diocese has two senior and qualified safeguarding advisers who can act, independently of the bishop if necessary, to ensure that people are kept safe. But this training and expertise can never be enough. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Some clergy and some laypeople don't yet get this. They think that if we appoint people with particular responsibility, that absolves everyone else of having to think or act in this matter. Far from it. If you think or suspect that a child or a teenager or a potentially vulnerable adult (and that could be any of us at certain points in our lives) is at risk or in danger, you have an absolute responsibility to say something. And if you think that someone, whoever it is, poses a threat to someone else, you must take action. This is not a matter of being an informant: the safeguarding professionals are skilled at dealing with these issues, investigating, and keeping people safe. We all have to make it possible for them to do their job, by making concerns known.

Let's live out the Gospel in this regard.

With best wishes

+ Donald

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