Love Protects – an open letter for Safeguarding Sunday

Dear parishioners, volunteers, clergy and friends,

As we mark Safeguarding Sunday, we take this opportunity to reflect on what safeguarding means within our Church communities and to reaffirm our shared commitment to creating environments where everyone is safe, valued, respected, and heard. Safeguarding Sunday reminds us that the responsibility to protect children, young people, and adults at risk belongs to all of us. It is also a moment to recognise the dedication of those who work and volunteer in safeguarding roles, helping to ensure that our parishes remain places of welcome, trust, compassion, care and. safety

This year, Safeguarding Sunday falls on the 15th of November, with a central theme of '**Love Protects'** which I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on now.

When people hear the word *safeguarding*, they often think of regulations, policies, forms, or DBS checks. Those things are important, of course, but safeguarding is really about something much deeper.

It's about how we care for one another.

It's about making sure that every person who comes through the doors of our churches, especially children, young people, and adults who may be vulnerable, experiences our communities as places of welcome, dignity, and safety.

In other words, safeguarding is one of the ways we put love into action.

And that's why I think this theme, **Love Protects**, captures safeguarding so beautifully.

When we truly love our neighbour, we don't just welcome them. We look out for them. We notice when something isn't right. We listen when someone is hurting. We help create environments where people can flourish and be safe.

That is what safeguarding is all about.

The work of the safeguarding team and our volunteers often happens quietly behind the scenes. We support parishes with safer recruitment so that the right people are appointed to positions of trust. We process DBS checks for clergy, employees, and volunteers. We provide advice when concerns arise. We also offer free training across the Diocese, helping people understand how to recognise abuse, respond to concerns, and support those who may need help.

Every year we train hundreds of people, free of charge, because safeguarding is not just the responsibility of a few specialists. It belongs to all of us.

Love protects when people are informed, confident, and willing to act.

Another part of safeguarding involves responding when concerns are raised.

Sometimes people worry about whether what they've noticed is important enough to report. My advice is always this: if something doesn't feel right, speak to someone.

Everyone here has a role in helping to build safe communities. You don't need to be a safeguarding professional to notice that someone may need help, or to raise a concern when something worries you.

Often, safeguarding begins with an ordinary person doing something extraordinary, caring enough to ask a question, make a phone call, or share a concern.

Love protects, because love pays attention.

There are also occasions when we work with individuals who may present a risk to others. These can be difficult situations, but our aim is always the same: to ensure that everyone can participate in the life of the Church as safely as possible.

Safeguarding challenges us to hold together two important Christian values: compassion and responsibility.

The Gospel calls us to welcome people, but it also calls us to protect those who are vulnerable. Good safeguarding helps us do both.

We also support those who have experienced abuse or harm.

Sometimes people come to us carrying painful experiences that they may have held for many years. Speaking about those experiences often takes tremendous courage.

When that happens, our first task is simple: to listen.

To listen respectfully, compassionately, and without judgement.

We hold this responsibility and ministry with the greatest respect and care, and we employ a dedicated Victim/Survivor caseworker to ensure we are able to listen, to support, and to guide those in need.

We may not always have all the answers, but we can make sure people are heard, supported, and helped to access the professional services and specialist support they need.

We are also working towards creating the first ‘Chaplaincy for Survivors of Abuse’ in England and Wales, hoping that the Diocese of Plymouth lights the way for others to be heard, accepted, and loved as they deserve. This is a project imagined and driven by the love and spirit of survivors, for survivors

One of the most powerful things we can do is to accompany someone who is suffering, to make sure they know they are not alone.

Love protects, but love also listens.

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Today I would especially like to thank our Parish Safeguarding Representatives, who volunteer their time and services throughout our Diocese. They provide invaluable support within their parish communities and are often the reassuring presence people turn to when they need advice or help.

I would also like to thank our clergy, volunteers, and parishioners who engage positively with safeguarding. Every DBS application completed, every training session attended, every concern raised appropriately, and every act of support offered to someone in difficulty contributes to a safer Church.

None of these actions may seem remarkable on their own.

But together, they are expressions of love.

As we leave today, I'd invite us all to remember that safeguarding isn't just a diocesan policy, and it certainly isn't just the work of a safeguarding team.

It's part of our mission as the Church.

It's part of how we live out the commandment to love one another.

Every child who feels safe in our parish.

Every vulnerable person who feels respected.

Every survivor who is listened to.

Every volunteer who is equipped and supported.

Every concern that is taken seriously.

These are all signs of a Church that is striving to reflect the love of Christ.

So in the spirit of Safeguarding Sunday, and every day moving forwards, let us continue building communities where people know they are welcome, valued, heard, and safe.

I hope that each of you, in some small way, feel the protection of love this weekend, and that those you meet feel it from you in return.

Because when love moves beyond words and becomes action, **love protects**.

Thank you, and God bless.



Martin Christmas-Nelson

Head Of Safeguarding (Diocese of Plymouth)