



A Letter for Safeguarding Sunday from Bishop Patrick

for parish newsletters and / or parish noticeboards

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th May 2024

“This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you.”

(John 15:12)

Today is Safeguarding Sunday. It's an opportunity to reflect a little on our ongoing journey as a diocese to build a safer environment for every person. You will recall that the Elliott review in 2020 recommended that the Catholic Church in England and Wales put in place a national safeguarding body. In July 2021 the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency was formed. Its task is to ensure that all dioceses are regulated to meet the national standards recommended in the Elliott Report.

As a diocese, our priority is to ensure that we are providing a safe environment for all those who come in contact with our parishes, chaplaincies, and the Catholic organisations at work throughout the diocese. So I do want to assure you that the diocese is very much committed to embedding robust safeguarding standards. The professional support of our Diocesan Safeguarding Department now enables the safer recruitment and training of all clergy, employees and volunteers. It also ensures that we are transparent and accountable in the way that all allegations and concerns are managed.

I wish to thank the Diocesan Safeguarding Department of Rachael Campion, Alan Booth and Jane Black for all their good work. I would also like to express my gratitude to the priests and parish safeguarding representatives for their generous commitment to improving safeguarding practices in their parishes. Additional training for clergy and parish safeguarding representatives is now in place. There is also safeguarding information available on the diocesan website, and an easy to read and comprehensive guide to safeguarding has been produced in the form of a very helpful Parish Safeguarding Handbook. Please do take a look at this material because it is the responsibility of each of us to help ensure that our churches and chaplaincies are both safe and welcoming. This is something that cannot just be left to the Diocesan Safeguarding Department, the clergy and the parish safeguarding representatives.

From meeting with and listening to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse I have come to understand, ever more deeply, that sexual abuse not only heinously violates a child at the time of their abuse, but it all too often cruelly robs a child of their future. Victims and survivors of sexual abuse continue to carry throughout their lives the painful and debilitating consequences of the grave crime of sexual abuse. I do not underestimate the traumatic and life-long consequences of sexual abuse upon their lives and how it also affects their families and parish communities. Please know that my door, and that of our Diocesan Safeguarding Department, is always open to anyone affected by abuse.

Like you, I continue to love Christ's Church, but I acknowledge that sexual abuse has stained the face of the Church and it has undermined her mission. I feel a deep sense of shame for this abuse. So, as Bishop, I am committed to ensuring that we do everything that we each can to learn from the past and to protect and keep safe the most vulnerable in our communities. There can be no room in our diocese for complacency or for not taking seriously the need for vigilance on the part of all of us. Thank you for doing all you can to support your parish priest and parish safeguarding representative* in fostering a deeper and more evident culture of safeguarding, care and protection for everyone in your parish or chaplaincy.

With my prayers and gratitude,

Rt Rev Patrick McKinney

Footnote to priests and deacons: If no parish representative is currently in place please use the opportunity to raise this with the parish and to ask if anyone would be interested in finding out more about this role. As you know, Rachael and the central Safeguarding team offer excellent training.