

Diocesan Safeguarding Vision launch service 18 June 2026
Bishop Tricia Hillas Address

Jesus said

*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
I am the good shepherd.*

When we hear the word ‘*safeguarding*’, our minds easily turn to policies, procedures, training, and responsibilities. And all of these truly matter.

But today, as we launch this Diocesan Safeguarding Vision, it is important we remember WHY safeguarding matters: we safeguard and commit to maintaining a safe caring culture because of what we believe about God.

And God’s character.

First, please look around at the people next or near to you. Arent they amazing? What gifts they have; seen and perhaps not yet known to you.

The opening chapters of the Bible tells us that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. Every child, young person, adult; every person who walks through the doors of our churches bears God's image and possesses a dignity that no-one and no circumstance can take away.

To safeguard another person, therefore, is not simply to manage risk. It is to honour the image of God in them. It is an act of reverence.

Furthermore, throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus paying attention, close attention to those others might overlook, to children, to the outsider, to those who are vulnerable or who are dealing with life’s challenges.

The Good Shepherd listens to those whose voices have been silenced; notices, protects, and creates space for people not merely to be present but to flourish.

St Paul offers a further image: the Church as the Body of Christ. Paul tells us that if one member suffers, all suffer together. The wellbeing of each person is a concern for the whole community. Safeguarding flows from this conviction that we are members of a body bound together in Jesus.

Since he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, we his body are called to reflect him. To be a body of honesty, transparency, accountability, and humility, that all may have LIFE.

This requires us to resist the temptation to protect reputation at the expense of people. It calls us to create cultures where concerns can be raised, where difficult conversations can be had, and where those who have been harmed can be heard with compassion and respect.

This is holy work.

It leads us to a consideration of power and how we exercise it amongst ourselves.

So having thought about the character of God and how this must shape us, let's think now about the gospel, vulnerability and the exercise of power

In Jesus coming to dwell among us, God forever binds himself to human vulnerability. God knows what it is to be dependent, exposed, misunderstood, betrayed, wounded, and harmed.

This means vulnerability is not something from which God stands apart. Vulnerability is something God has entered.

This matters profoundly for safeguarding.

For whenever we, the Church, encounter those who have been harmed, silenced, or neglected, we are not meeting people who stand outside the story of God but rather the very people besides whom Christ came to stand.

Creating a safe-caring culture requires the holy exercise of power.

The question is never whether power exists in the Church. It does.

Clergy have power.

Church officers have power.

Long-standing, members have power.

Even Bishops have power.

The Gospel question is: How will that power be exercised?

In Jesus, power kneels to wash feet.

In Jesus, authority serves.

In Jesus, greatness is measured by self-giving love.

Sadly, a common thread when the church has failed in its safeguarding has been its failure to exercise power after the pattern of Jesus.

So I ask you, to remind me to use the power invested in my office with grace and wisdom. Please challenge me (with kindness please) when I need to be challenged. Together let us be a people who speak words of love but also truth.

For the church is called to be a sign and a foretaste of God's kingdom.

If we proclaim a God who welcomes, protects, heals, and restores, then our common life must reflect those same qualities.

Every church community and ministry, however imperfectly, is to offer the world a glimpse of God and God's future—shaped by justice, truth, mercy and peace.

When people enter our churches, they should discover something of what humanity looks like when God's grace has begun its work.

A safeguarding culture is therefore not merely a safer version of church. It is a more truthful version of church learning to be what God calls us to be.

A community where people can speak truth without fear.

Where dignity is guarded.

Where accountability is embraced.

Where love is expressed in words yes, but also in structures, habits, and relationships.

For love without accountability becomes sentimentality.

And accountability without love becomes control.

The Gospel calls us to both.

So, as we launch this safeguarding vision today, we are not simply adopting a strategy.

We are saying that the image of God matters here.

That truth matters here.

That power will be exercised responsibly here.

That every child, every young person, every vulnerable person, every survivor; every person matters here.

Because Jesus is here.

The Church does not safeguard because the law requires it, though the law does.

The Church does not safeguard because society expects it, though society should.

The Church safeguards because every human person is beloved of God.

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep. He notices when one is in danger.

He does not walk away from difficult realities.

Whenever we recognise, protect, and cherish the dignity of one another we participate in the work of the God who came that all might have life.

Together we are privileged to share in the ministry of the Great Shepherd;
And to foster churches where people are safe enough to belong, to grow, to speak,
and safe enough to encounter the transforming love of God.

To the clergy among us: your leadership helps set the tone. When safeguarding is spoken about openly from the front, it becomes part of the culture of the church.

To our lay readers and licensed ministers: you also speak from the front but your ministry also often places you alongside people whose voices may not otherwise be heard. Your attentiveness is a gift.

To our parish safeguarding officers: thank you. Much of your work is unseen, but it is essential. You help us become a community where trust can grow and where concerns can be raised without fear.

And to all of us: safeguarding is about preventing harm but it is also about reflecting the character of God.

Every safer church is a sign of God's kingdom, where truth is honoured, and where all are valued as made in the image of God.

May God grant us grace for this task, courage in carrying it out, humility to keep learning and growing and love at the heart of all we do.

Amen.