



## **A Sermon on Safeguarding**

Preached on Safeguarding Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021

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You know how it is that every so often people will tell you that it's World such-and-such a day. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> December is World AIDS day. There are all sorts of these days: 10<sup>th</sup> October is World Mental Health Day. But, actually, I don't want to talk about that – even though it's a very important subject which is really topical in these days of post-lockdown covid. And it's a subject that is often related to the one I want to talk about. But I am not going to talk about World Mental Health Day. What I would like us to consider for the next few minutes is a subject that affects all of us. Today is Safeguarding Sunday.

I can almost hear some of you asking, "how does that affect me?" Well, let me tell you! Are you sitting comfortably? I shall begin. Let's start at the very beginning: what do we mean by safeguarding? It's pretty much what it says on the tin: it's about making sure that everyone who comes to the Cathedral is safe; and we are particularly concerned for the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding is about the steps the Church takes to promote a safer culture in all our churches. Our commitment as a Cathedral is that we 'will promote the welfare of children, young people and adults. We will work to prevent abuse from occurring. We will seek to protect those that are at risk of being abused and respond well to those that have been abused. We will take care to identify where a person may present a risk to others, and offer support to them whilst taking steps to mitigate such risks.'

And whose responsibility is it to ensure that the Cathedral is a safe place? Well, that's where we all come in; all of us are responsible; each and every one of us. We have a Safeguarding policy on display and we have a number of people who have been identified as having some responsibility for promoting safeguarding. But when push comes to shove, it's everyone's responsibility. If you see something that doesn't look right or doesn't feel right, then you need to do something about it. You can't just hope that someone else will have seen the same thing, or that someone else will report their concern. Regardless of circumstances, if you see or hear something which makes you think that a child, young person or vulnerable adult may be being neglected or abused in any way, you should not hesitate to report your concerns. Do not attempt to investigate or resolve the situation – you are not expected to sort the situation out or become a safeguarding expert – you just need

to be aware and to report it. If in doubt there are 4 Rs to help you: Recognise, respond, refer and record. The first is the most important of those because you can't do any of the other three until you have recognised a concern.

Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian faith. One of our fundamental Christian beliefs is that we are all made unique and in the image of God. Right at the beginning of the book of Genesis at the Creation we are told that God made us in his image. Which means that each of us is almost infinitely precious and valuable. I know what we may not always feel that about ourselves or even about other people, but if we believe this to be true, then it must affect how we behave towards other people.

Sadly, we all know only too well that the Church hasn't always got it right – far from it. There are far too many stories of abuse and cover up in the C of E and other denominations and other faith groups for us to deny what has gone wrong so many times. Only last week it was the Roman Catholic Church in France that was in the news with hundreds of thousands of children who have been abused over the last 70 years or so – and those are only the ones that the authorities know about. But the C of E has more than its share of bad news and our failings are out there in the public domain. As an institution I think we have to repent of these past failures and do everything we possibly can to make sure that they cannot happen again. And one of the most powerful ways of making sure that they can't be repeated is to make sure that everyone is aware of the issue of safeguarding and that we all know our responsibilities. Whose responsibility is safeguarding? Everyone's! Safeguarding is not an optional extra, it's not something that should have to think about as a bolt-on; it has to be at the very core of our Cathedral, and the whole Church. Let me read you a paragraph from the C of E website which sets out why this is so important.

'The Church of England is called to share the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The life of our communities and institutions is integral to how we address this task. The good news speaks of welcome for all, with a particular regard for those who are most vulnerable, into a community where the value and dignity of every human being is affirmed and those in positions of responsibility and authority are truly trustworthy. Being faithful to our call to share the gospel therefore compels us to take with the utmost seriousness the challenge of preventing abuse from happening and responding well where it has.'

Safeguarding Sunday could hardly have come at a better time for us at Peterborough because next month we are due to have an external safeguarding audit by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (usually referred to as the SCIE audit; it has nothing to do with the blue – or grey – thing up in the heavens, it's an acronym for Social Care Institute for Excellence). Two auditors will be with us for a couple or three days to see where we are doing ok and to point out things that we could do better in the field of safeguarding. If you would like to make any comments to the auditors or to our safeguarding team, they and we would be pleased if you would do so. Many of you will know Tim Hitch, our Independent

Safeguarding officer. I am the member of Chapter with responsibility for safeguarding – not one Tim, but two! Please watch out for a link to how to provide your comments in a confidential way.

Finally, I know that safeguarding can be a difficult topic – especially for the survivors of abuse – if you want to talk about anything there are a number of places where you can find help. As well as the obvious one of talking to someone there is a new and independent service called Safe Spaces which is a free, national support service independently run by Victim Support. It provides a confidential, personal and safe space for anyone who has been abused through their relationship with either the Church. Just put in ‘safe spaces’ to an internet search engine and you will get straight through.

So I don’t expect you to remember that today is world Mental Health Day, nor do you need to remember that today is Safeguarding Sunday; but I do hope that you can remember the answer to the question: Whose responsibility is safeguarding? The answer is Everyone’s. And the reason for that is because as followers of Jesus we need to care for all our fellow children, women and men – and we have a particular care for children and those who are vulnerable.

Tim Alban Jones