

Sermon slot on Safeguarding. November 7th 2021

Hello everyone; I feel very privileged to be standing here and a bit nervous too! For those of you who do not know me, my name is Ioana Davies though most people call me Yo. I have recently taken on the role of Safeguarding officer for our parish of Kidlington with Hampton Poyle. You may remember that Ann Ling has done this for the past few years. Why me?? My career, prior to retirement, involved promoting the health and welfare of others and the prevention of abuse and neglect. I have been asked to talk about the need for safe guarding in each of our churches. This is not an easy, light hearted topic to talk about, it's not really possible to weave in amusing moments but the aim is to keep everyone including **me and you** and those you care about safe.

Safeguarding sounds like a sort of modern, recent idea. We read about it in the newspapers, we hear and see stories relating to it on the television. Sadly what makes the news is **when safeguarding fails** in an institution, a hospital, a school or sadly a church. This is a pity as there are far more examples of good , caring safeguarding that we never hear about and yet it is in these safe places that everyone knows that they belong , are cared about and have someone to talk to if they are worried or concerned. That is what we want to achieve **here** both for those who commit their time and energy to helping others and for those who benefit.

Safeguarding or safe keeping is, in fact an ancient idea and certainly one rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. This week the World has been using the term safe guarding in relation to our beautiful planet Earth – Today, here, I want to focus on what we can do to protect vulnerable people. We know that Jesus cares for all, particularly those in society who are seen as the least, the last or the lost. We see him working throughout his ministry to help those who are vulnerable. So safe guarding is not a modern, tick box rather irritating notion, but a necessity; ...particularly so within a church community. A community driven by love; love for God, for our saviour Jesus Christ and for our neighbours. A community which by its very nature welcomes all. It is this fact, **that our** doors are open to all that makes it even more necessary to keep safe guarding uppermost in our parish ministry and worship. It may not be mentioned by name in the gospels but Jesus shows us many examples of noticing and responding to those who need our help and care.

Our safeguarding policy is that approved by the Church of England House of Bishops, called “Promoting a Safer Church”; we are **required** to follow it.... That’s why we have a Safe guarding Officer!!

So, how can we promote safeguarding here?

We make it clear to everyone who comes into our churches or who engages with our online presence that we follow the policy.

We have posters in every church with contact details of people who can help.

We require training for all who are in any sort of leadership position in our church...Clergy, those on the PCC, those who interact with children in play groups, those involved with Sunday school, with choir, with bell ringing.

We have wonderful volunteers who visit people at home for pastoral reasons or to discuss funerals, weddings, baptisms, those who lead our prayer groups and house groups...These are privileged positions and so the volunteers are all offered training and some **must** complete it in order to undertake the role. This training helps us to understand what can go wrong, what types of abuse or neglect can occur, how to help those who have suffered and what to do if you are concerned that abuse or neglect may be occurring. – The type of problem one may encounter has changed over the years and that is why, even if you have been a regular church attender or helper for years, it helps to do the training. For example: online interactions of several types have grown enabling abuse to occur where it could not before. We have all read about elderly people being caught up in financial scams by unscrupulous people. There have even been cases in our Oxford diocese where church leaders have not kept their church members safe (**quite the reverse**) and have committed serious crimes against them.

So we need to recognise when things don’t look or sound quite right. If this had happened in these parishes maybe the outcomes would have been different.

So the idea that things can go so wrong sounds incredible, impossible perhaps, and absolutely impossible that it could happen here; but we shouldn’t be over confident in ourselves.

Psalm 62 which we read today, cautions against putting all our trust in solely in people, whoever they may be, because as the psalmist says, you’re putting

your hope in the equivalent of thin air! But it is also a Psalm expressing the utmost confidence in God...we need to trust Him and see Him as our Rock and our salvation. It is this trust that Jesus embodies as he spreads the good news of the coming Kingdom of God; it is his divine presence that leads the disciples to abandon their jobs and devote themselves to following Him and helping to bring that Kingdom about. He will teach them as they travel together about protecting the vulnerable and little children and in Matthew Chapter 18, he will caution them in no uncertain terms against causing them any harm.

It is working towards this Kingdom that we are about here in Kidlington and Hampton Poyle. We want to make the path as smooth as possible so that everyone knows what to look out for when things do go wrong and, if seen or suspected to have a path to follow and to have someone to ask for advice or help. This, of course includes those who think they need help, guidance or rehabilitation. We can only try to do our best and as imperfect human beings; it helps both to pray and to have a set of clear sign posts to follow. Having a greater understanding also keeps us safe. We learn not to do things that could be misinterpreted.

We encourage anyone who thinks they would benefit to undertake the basic and foundation safe guarding training. You do not need to see yourself as a leader to do the courses. Any member of the congregation may sign up. They are now done online through the Church of England website and are free but if anyone would find working online a problem, I am happy to help people or to deliver the training in person.

I will stay behind after the service to answer any questions you may have or indeed to listen if you have found what I have been talking about upsetting or difficult or would like to know more. However I hope you have found this introduction to safe guarding here at St Mary's reassuring – that is certainly what is intended.

Thank you for listening.