

Sermon slot on Safeguarding; January 23rd 2022

Hello everyone; Thank you for inviting me here to St John's today. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Ioana Davies though most people call me Yo. I am the 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, the prevention of abuse and neglect and setting up and running parenting groups. I have been asked to talk about the need for safe guarding in each of our churches. This is not a light hearted topic to talk about, it's not really possible to weave in amusing anecdotes but the aim is to keep everyone including **me and you** and those you care about safe and to inspire you to learn more about it and make it a priority!

The readings today contain reassurance about safeguarding. The more I focus on increasing safeguarding knowledge in our churches and in the services that we provide, the more I see it as woven into the very fabric of both the Old and particularly New Testament message. So it is not a modern, recent, tick box idea. Today in Psalm 19 we hear David saying:

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

He goes on to warn about the importance of keeping God's commandments:

By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

So back to today...Safeguarding here and now. 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. Where it is successfully instituted people of all ages know that they 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.

That is why the Church of England and our own Diocese regards it as important that we are trained in recognising when things are not right and we know how to deal with problems in a sensitive, effective way. So as the psalmist says we are not wilfully sinful or indeed just unable to recognise our own errors. None of us are perfect, we each have our own ideas of what is right and wrong and it is in order that we all follow the same guidelines that we have a Parish safeguarding policy.

That is not to detract from each individual's gifts. We all have something to offer in helping the vulnerable and keeping them and children safe in our care. Indeed I am not just addressing those who help with Sunday school or who volunteer with the hub or pastoral visiting team...some of us who may no longer be particularly active through illness or frailty can offer prayers and others by their presence in the church community offer guidance and advice. But as St Paul says "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it". He cautions us to be aware of all, to care for everyone wherever they come from, whatever their background – indeed to treat those who are the most in need with the greater respect.

So here I want to say that safeguarding should not be looked on as some sort of idea that we are always on the lookout for things that might be wrong but rather an opportunity to foster the positive by example. By training one is aware of what might go wrong but also, driven by our concern for others we can demonstrate how to care positively and effectively and to respect others

Our Church community is driven by love; love for God, for our saviour Jesus Christ and for our neighbours. A community which by its very nature welcomes all but 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. So we make it clear to everyone who comes into our churches or who engages with our online presence that we follow the safeguarding policy approved by the Church of England House of Bishops, called "Promoting a Safer Church" We are however **required** to follow it.... That's why we have a Safeguarding Officer!!

So, how can we promote safeguarding here?

Please make sure that if you are working with Children and /or vulnerable adults or on the PCC that you complete the training required, that it is up to date and that you let me know! Most parts of the courses need to be renewed every three years.

We have posters in every church with contact details of people who can help if you are concerned about someone's safety or if you have questions.

Clergy, those on the PCC, those who interact with children in play groups, those involved with Sunday school or with choir need to show that they have safeguarding knowledge as delivered and approved by the Church.

Our dedicated volunteers who visit people who may be ill, frail or elderly at home for pastoral reasons or to discuss funerals, weddings, baptisms, those who lead our prayer groups and house groups are in privileged positions and as such **must** complete training in order to undertake their roles. 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 get updated. Now for example we need to think about **online interactions** which help us in many ways but which enable abuse to occur where it could not before. We have all read about elderly people being caught up in financial scams by unscrupulous people. **Also having a greater understanding of safeguarding also keeps us safe. We learn not to do things that could be misinterpreted.**

There have even been cases in parishes in our own Oxford diocese where church leaders have not kept their church members safe (**quite the reverse**) and have committed serious crimes against them.

Even here in this friendly village we need to recognise when things don't look or sound quite right and tell someone. It is this asking of questions, whoever those questions are about, that is so important. Remember The Psalm, "But who can discern their own errors?" If this questioning had happened in the parishes I mentioned maybe the outcomes would have been different.

Safeguarding 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.

Jesus cautions his listeners and disciples in no uncertain terms against causing people, particularly the vulnerable any harm. His “Good News” is about caring for others, keeping them safe and relieving hardship. That is what we want to do here. We want to make the path as smooth as possible so that everyone knows what to do for the best and to know what to do if things going wrong. This guidance, of course includes those who think they need help for themselves, or rehabilitation or are concerned about their own behaviour. We can only try to do our best and as imperfect human beings. So here in our parish we encourage as many people as possible to undertake the basic and foundation safe guarding training. You do not need to see yourself as a church 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 in our Parish reassuring – that is certainly what is intended.

I end with the collect for today from the Book of Common Prayer:

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.