

Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, next week Advent begins. Our focus is usually Christ the King so it might seem an odd week to recommend as Safeguarding Sunday. Why should the Diocese recommend that we devote a Sunday to safeguarding?

Let's answer that by asking what it means to us that Christ is King. Clearly his kingdom is not established everywhere and for all people. We are taught to pray "your kingdom come, your will be done."

Christ's kingdom is present where His people do His will. Christ is honoured as King when His people put into practice His teaching.

If we hear Christ's words and take no notice, we are like the builder, building on sand. If we hear His word, take note and put it into practice, we are the builder, building on solid rock.

In our Gospel reading Jesus teaches that all the law and the commandments are encapsulated very simply. Love the Lord your God with heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself.

You can't have the one without the other. The expression of your love for God is found in your love for your neighbour. Your capacity to love your neighbour flows from God's love for you and Your love for Him.

So how we care for, love and protect our neighbour is an outworking of our love for God and honouring Christ as King.

Which brings us to safeguarding. Quite simply, it's making sure that we do everything we can to make sure our church is a safe place for everyone, in particular children and vulnerable adults.

The work and the extent to which safeguarding has become such a large and wide-ranging responsibility has been growing now for 20 years. The CRB – the Criminal Record Bureau check was first introduced in 2002. This allowed employers to check on the background of employees.

In 2007 the Independent Safeguarding Authority added in the vetting and barring element to the checks and in 2012 the two were merged to create the Disclosure and Barring Service, DBS quite a large number of church members have a DBS certificate relevant to the work they do.

During all that time it has been recognised that some institutions that should have cared for children and vulnerable adults fell far short. The church, schools, colleges, football clubs, youth organisations, nursing homes – the list goes on and on of failings to care.

If we take the church as an example, it has moved from covering up abuse, to acknowledging, repenting and acting on the requirement to make sure the church is a safe place.

And so – we have a safeguarding policy reviewed every year by the PCC. We have a safer recruitment policy reviewed every year by PCC. We have a policy for the recruitment of ex-offenders, reviewed every year by PCC and a policy statement about promoting a safer church.

This gives me an excuse to talk about some church members.

We have an exceptional safeguarding officer in Becky Meadows. The administration of safeguarding is huge – the paperwork and record keeping and the training and Becky appears to do all that effortlessly, which I'm sure is not the case, but she serves the church in an exemplary way. Becky is on the PCC and

safeguarding is on every agenda. She writes the report that comes to the Annual Meeting.

And I mentioned training, we are richly blessed in the Stephanie and Dolapo are trainers for the Diocese. So for example, those of us that needed to attend training on domestic abuse were able to be here, Dolapo took one session, Stephanie took the other and we are able to access the training led by our friends.

I have observed when attending events elsewhere that there can be two attitudes to this whole matter of safeguarding. The reluctant "what is it we have to do" which means "let's make sure we've ticked all the boxes so the Diocese don't come down on us".

Or the attitude that Becky and Dolapo and Stephanie promote which starts with – we are called to be Christ-like. We are called to care. Our Christian duty and responsibility is to love our neighbour as ourselves. What do we need to do?

When it can all seem a bit onerous – and I freely admit, two, two hour sessions and a workbook and a reflection to renew my safeguarding training can seem an uphill struggle – I only have to stop and think what the consequences of ignorance and being casual might bring...in order to get on with it.

If you want to familiarise yourself with what your church is doing you only need to look at the website. Safeguarding is on the front page. If you click on "read more" then everything is clearly laid out and whether it's something you want to report, or know about or see who Becky is...it's very very easy to find all this information.

As a church we are also very closely linked to our Primary school, a number of church members are Governors, Dolapo is one and she and I are the named safeguarding, Governors. Our duty is

make sure the school policies are up to date and being followed and that the Single Central Record is up to date.

Holy Trinity Primary is a small school of 211 pupils, single form entry. You would not believe how huge the single central record is of everyone connected in any way with the school. All the staff, the TA's, the support staff. All the Governors. All the parents who go in and help. All the regular visitors. Even people who come on site to do maintenance. An unbelievable document that we check to do as much as possible to say, this is a safe place.

When I was up in Nottingham, I was part time chaplain and a Governor at my neighbouring academy which had two and a half thousand pupils. I was safeguarding governor there as well. Checking their single central record took forever. It wasn't without a light-hearted moment.

It was such a huge school, based on two sites and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (the DSL) came up with a cunning plan to advertise who the key individuals were across the academy should anyone want to report something or share something or speak up. So she had a notice printed with the photographs and the names and contact details of the DSL's and me as the safeguarding governor – and these were stuck on the back of the door of every toilet cubicle that staff used.

A female member of staff came to me and said "whenever I go to the toilet, I've got you looking at me," which was an odd thing to say the least – but it worked! They knew who I was and the role I had.

There's one last thing I want to say about safeguarding and it's the change in the culture of speaking up and openly sharing. We have been taught very strongly not to gossip and not to judge and not to pry...so it does take a change in the culture to speak freely to someone about something that concerns you.

There are many examples of people doing just that and those concerns coming together and revealing a situation that requires intervention.

We've come this morning to worship, it's not the annual meeting and it's not a PCC meeting or a briefing session but I believe in this service we are echoing the heart of what the prophet Micah was saying.

If we come to worship, sing the songs, say the prayers, give our gifts but overlook what God requires of us, to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God then our worship is hollow. Knowing that this church is seeking to fulfil the command to love our neighbour can be a reason to offer heartfelt worship.

Anglican priest John Wesley summed up Jesus words when he said...

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can".

Let us pray.

**Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 20/11/22**