

Safeguarding in our Parish.

For those of you in the world of work, the word 'safeguarding' will mean something to you, especially if you work in a profession such as teaching or nursing. For others, you may well be wondering what it means and what it has to do with us in church. Safeguarding is really what it says..... it's about keeping us all safe. We have systems in place to ensure that the structure of the building is safe for us to enter and this falls under the heading of 'health and safety'. Systems that ensure that all those who come to church or who are involved in any of our groups can attend without fear of harm coming to them, falls under the heading of 'safeguarding'. Safeguarding is about protecting us from physical, emotional, sexual, monetary or religious abuse, exploitation and harm. It means that we will have systems and routines in place to promote the wellbeing of all and that any concerns will be taken seriously. A practical illustration is that those of us who work with children and young people always work alongside another adult and, furthermore, have been trained in safeguarding by the Church of England and have undergone the necessary police checks.

Safeguarding, however, is not just the concern of those who work with our children. It is the concern of all of us. In our church interactions, we come into contact with a range of people, some of whom will be particularly vulnerable, perhaps because of their age or maybe some kind of physical or learning challenge. We all need to be aware of how we respond to the vulnerable and have a mind to the potential power and influence we can hold over them. This influence can and must be of a positive nature and should reflect the open and caring culture of our church. If we wish to promote such a culture, we have to have respect for all and be a listening congregation where all have a voice.

As the Parish Safeguarding Officer, it is my responsibility to work with Matthew and the PCC to promote such an environment and to offer support where needed. A Parish Safeguarding Policy has been written which adheres to all the policies and guidelines of the House of Bishops. Our policy can be found in both churches, in the Centre and on our website. Rochester Diocese has produced a number of detailed resources, policies and guidelines and these can be found on their website. We have a Lead Recruiter who, alongside the DBS administrator, ensures that all police checks are carried out in a timely fashion for all those who work or volunteer with our children and vulnerable adults. We work in close collaboration with Diocesan advisers and refer all concerns on. They provide valuable support, guidance and clarification on a range of safeguarding matters.

Safeguarding therefore, is at the heart of all that we do and reflects a culture of openness, respect and wellbeing for all. It informs our actions in relationship with one another – how we greet, welcome and respond to each other – how we involve new people in our groups – our voice, tone and respect for each persons' personal physical space. It involves systems and protocols for structured groups and a willingness to talk about safeguarding and respond to concerns and allegations with sensitivity.

Irene Dancer
Parish Safeguarding Officer

To conclude, a message from our Archbishop taken from the Parish Safeguarding Handbook produced by the National Safeguarding Team and which can be located on the Rochester Diocesan website....

"Dear Colleagues

Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian faith. We are all made unique and in the image of God. Jesus came that we might have life and have it in abundance (see John 10.10).

'Safeguarding' means the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture in all our churches. In order to achieve this, we need to do a lot of hard work. 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 who are at risk of being abused and respond well to those who 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.

The Church will take appropriate steps to maintain a safer environment for all. In order to do this, we must be obedient to Christ who placed a child in the midst of his disciples and encourages us all to be childlike in our faith (see Matthew 18.1-5). So, we must practise fully and positively a ministry to all children, young people and adults, and respond sensitively and compassionately to their needs in order to help keep them safe from harm.

Yours in Christ's fellowship,

Archbishop Justin Welby"