

Dear Friends,

I would like to welcome you to the safeguarding pages of our Diocesan website.

Safeguarding is an essential part in the life and ministry of the Church. It is the responsibility of us all to ensure our parishes and institutions are safe places for all comers, especially those who are vulnerable. We all have our part to play. Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone.

Abuse and harm have no place in our Diocese. The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and I as your Bishop have a zero tolerance to abuse, harm or any behaviour that falls short of appropriate safeguarding practice.

Jesus welcomed children and blessed them. We are told that Jesus was indignant when anyone tried to keep the children away, *“Let the little children come to me and do not stop them. It is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.”* (Mark 10: 14) Our mission is to bless people with the presence of Christ and never harm them. Jesus also makes clear about his view about those who seek to harm the vulnerable. He uses very stark words, *“[...] It would be better that they are drowned in the depths of the sea.”* (Matthew 18: 5 – 6) Abuse is evil. It is destructive. It has no place in the Church.

As your Bishop I am committed, with everyone in the Diocese, to ensure that all diocesan institutions, our parishes, clergy, employees, and volunteers will take all appropriate steps to maintain a safe environment for everyone and put into practice Christ’s ministry towards the

vulnerable. I ask, indeed I insist, that safeguarding is a standing item at all parish and diocesan meetings. This is to ensure safeguarding is embedded in our everyday culture and practice.

As a Diocese we are committed to accompany and support all victim/survivors of abuse and we seek to learn from them and their representatives about best safeguarding practice. Personally, I am committed to meet and listen to those who have suffered abuse in the Church or elsewhere. I am deeply sorry to all people who have suffered abuse. Our recent LOUDfence prayer events, held with Newcastle Cathedral, is one public sign of that commitment. I thank everyone involved in those powerful, moving, and fruitful days of LOUDfence.

The following pages on this website have reference and guidance documents to assist you as well as details of support organisations. Below, in the '*Contact Us*' section, you will find the details of the safeguarding team and what to do if you are aware of abusive behaviour or have any other concerns.

Back in June 2023, our Diocese was audited by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency. Its report is an insight into the whole of our Diocese because safeguarding is the responsibility of us all, not just the safeguarding team, nor me as your Bishop.

That report showed where we are doing well and where improvements are needed. Over the last 12 months we have been working on an agreed action plan to embed ever better safeguarding practices and culture. You can see the action

plan and the improvements we are making on this website. But improving safeguarding culture and practice never ends. We are always learning; we are always improving.

I wish to thank our safeguarding team and its committee, all our parish safeguarding representatives and all our clergy, employees and volunteers for their commitment and dedicated practice to safeguard the vulnerable. And I want to thank you all. Everybody is called to safeguard the vulnerable. Nothing less is acceptable.

We pray for all who have suffered abuse. May the Lord bless our Diocese. And may Our Lady, the mother of the Lord and the chief safeguarder of the Church, pray for us and bless us. Amen.

With assurances of prayers,

+Stephen