

*'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.'* *John 15:1-8*

The invitation to abide in the love of God is one that we can both hear and receive each and every day. Jesus does not extend the invitation only once. The invitation is not time limited. Learning to abide in God's love is a life task. Turning to God and saying yes to the invitation to become a disciple of Jesus is a process of becoming – becoming the people that God has called us to be. We are all unique and made in the image of God, each with our own value and dignity. God loves every person and longs for fullness of life for us all.

We know that so much can prevent us from experiencing fullness of life and from being the people that God calls us to be. This is why the Church of England is committed to promoting a safer culture in all our churches in order that the welfare of children, young people and adults is assured. This is known as safeguarding and it is a shared task. It is something that we are all asked to do together.

Every person is equally precious to God which means that we have a duty to respect and to value all people. As a Church, we are committed to providing safe, sensitive, responsive and caring environments for children and adults at risk. We are safeguarding against abuse in its many forms: physical, sexual, emotional, financial, psychological, domestic and spiritual; we are safeguarding against neglect, exploitation and trafficking.

Sadly, you will be all too aware of the many times when the Church is rightly criticised for having failed people. We acknowledge this and we are committed to doing better in order to ensure that our worshipping communities are a safe place for children and vulnerable adults. We seek to balance good preventative practices and good responsive practices in order to ensure as far as possible that the culture of our churches has changed and continues to change for the better.

Safeguarding is hugely complicated and ever changing. We are so fortunate to have a safeguarding team in the Diocese of Gloucester with someone on duty 24/7. At the beginning of 2020, new training for many volunteers in the church became mandatory. When the pandemic struck, the training was offered on line. Thank you to all who have undertaken the on line courses; I know that we have all found them informative and valuable.

Each parish has to have Parish Safeguarding Officers. At the Annual Meeting last week, Mary Gould and Roxy Nichols were reappointed as our Parish Safeguarding Officers. We thank them for taking on this important role. The annual meeting also approved the parish safeguarding policies that are

displayed on the notice boards in our churches and halls. As a parish we seek to create a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults, act promptly on any complaints made, care for those who have been abused in the past, minister appropriately to those who have abused and provide opportunities for healing and flourishing. Thank you for your part in this.

*Rev Canon Nikki Arthy, Rector*

I have been involved in safeguarding for over 20 years now. I mention this as it shows my commitment to the important issue of safeguarding which is a subject which concerns everyone, and one we should all be conscious of.

Over the years, aspects have changed somewhat, which is why we continually update our training, as things have changed socially. There are the obvious concerns like neglect and physical abuse which remain the same. But now there are now newer ones because of social media. These relate more to mental abuse, like cyber-bullying, which particularly appertains to teenagers. We have had different concerns also because of the constraints caused by Covid-19. There has been an increase in domestic abuse, with the negative psychological effects on the children who witness it.

This is an ever-evolving subject, but the basic premise is the same: every person, young or old, fit or not so fit, is entitled to feel safe and secure, whether it be at home, at work, at school, at worship, or anywhere. And that is something we should all strive for.

*Roxy Nicholls, Parish Safeguarding Officer*

What comes into your mind when you hear the word safeguarding? It could be working together to fulfil the demands of the law and to follow the regulations required by the Church of England through the diocese. Your thoughts may turn to training and the need to have a DBS clearance. Certainly these are all aspects of safeguarding. Some may think of the scandals that have embroiled the diocese and wider Church. Others may ponder upon the victims and survivors of abuse and then turn their minds to what we must do to prevent these tragedies recurring, of all places, in the church.

Prevention of abuse wherever we are is fundamental to all safeguarding. Yes, we have to react if we are confronted with suspicions and we must always be watchful to keep everyone, including ourselves, safe. We also need to be aware that abuse takes many forms. If asked I'm sure we could draw up quite a list but perhaps ridicule, fault finding, being dismissed as of being little or no consequence may not figure high on that list. An atmosphere where there is fear of saying or doing the wrong thing and undue pressure to conform leads to humiliation and rejection. This kind of abuse needs to be on our radar as in some ways we can get sucked into it ourselves. It can happen if we find ourselves in a group where we want to be on the side of the person with power who is being abusive rather on the vulnerable person on the receiving end. We pray that this would not happen in a church group but should you be aware that this is happening the advice is, as with all safeguarding issues: talk it through with Roxy or me or bring it to Nikki's attention. Our contact details are on the weekly pew sheet, parish website and church notice boards.

*Mary Gould, Parish Safeguarding Officer*