

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel, the Lord Jesus speaks words to us which strike directly to the heart of our Christian calling: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love is not a mere sentiment, but an action. It is a way of living that demands our full faithfulness to Christ. And today - when we consider the role Safeguarding plays in the life of the Church - we are reminded that one of the clearest and most necessary ways we live out this love is by ensuring the protection, dignity, and wellbeing of the most vulnerable amongst us.

The Church, entrusted with proclaiming the Good News, must be a place where the vulnerable are safe; where the wounded are heard, and where all are welcomed with compassion. The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is not a peripheral issue. It is central to our faithfulness as disciples of the Lord Jesus. It is a sacred responsibility — and one that I, as your Archbishop, carry with deep humility and vigilance.

Paul and Barnabas encouraged the early Christian communities to remain faithful through their tribulations; and indeed, the Church continues to endure trials — including the painful reality of abuse that has harmed countless lives. But from such suffering, we are called to remain faithful to the authentic message of God's love. With repentance and resolve, we must commit ourselves to renewal, endeavouring to make the Church a sanctuary where trust

is restored, the Good News preached without fear, and Christ's love is made visible in our care for one another.

Our beloved late Holy Father, Pope Francis, made safeguarding a priority of the Church's mission, reminding us that people who suffer abuse "are the Lord's wounded flesh." They must be met with justice and mercy. To this end, he urged every diocese in the world to establish clear systems of accountability, transparency, and accompaniment for survivors.

In the Archdiocese of Southwark, we have committed wholeheartedly to this vision. Our diocesan safeguarding structures are grounded in professionalism, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Clergy and Parish Safeguarding Representatives work with our central safeguarding team — a group of dedicated and experienced professionals who ensure safer recruitment, manage concerns, and support survivors with care and discretion. We collaborate closely with the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency, statutory bodies, and safeguarding charities to ensure our practices are both rigorous and responsive.

Safeguarding is not the work of a few. It is a shared responsibility for us all. Each of us — clergy, volunteers, parents, parishioners — is called to remain vigilant and informed, and committed to the well-being of every member of our community.

Part of being a faithful Catholic today entails being someone who safeguards. If we want to be genuine in our discipleship, as followers of the Lord Jesus, we need to ensure that our parishes are places of integrity, accountability, and healing. It means

taking safeguarding training seriously. It means reporting concerns without fear or delay. It means supporting survivors with prayer, compassion, and tangible care. As the Psalmist reminds us today, we are called to reflect the divine mercy of God by creating communities where no one is overlooked, silenced, or left behind.

In September this year — on the 24 September at 6pm, to be precise — we will come together for our annual Archdiocesan Service for Those Harmed by Abuse at St George's Metropolitan Cathedral. It is a moment of prayer and solidarity, a public expression of our deep sorrow and our hope for healing. I invite all who can to attend. Let it be a sign that this archdiocese listens, and that it stands with those who suffer.

We also continue to make practical support available to anyone affected by abuse, whether it has occurred within the Church or elsewhere. Our safeguarding team is ready to offer a compassionate response, rooted in the message of love proclaimed in today's Gospel.

And so, let me return to that Gospel: "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." This commandment calls us to more than private devotion. It challenges us to become a Church of justice and protection, a place where Christ's love is manifest in action.

Our faithfulness is measured by how we care for the most vulnerable. Our discipleship is revealed in the courage to confront wrongdoing, to support those who suffer, and to build a future where the Church is safe for all.

May the Risen Christ, who is making all things new, bless our Archdiocese, and everyone within it, with the grace to continue this mission of safeguarding with humility, courage, and hope.

With an assurance of my prayers, and with every blessing

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John

*The Most Reverend John Wilson*

*Archbishop of Southwark*