

Diocesan Safeguarding Day, 2022

Letter from Archbishop Farrell

Sunday, 25 September, is Diocesan Safeguarding Sunday. This year the theme of the day is "Safeguarding – a Gospel Value". Children occupy a central role in the teachings of Jesus, who pointed to the child as the ultimate symbol of the Kingdom of God. 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it' (Lk 18:17).

Safeguarding Sunday is now a regular part of the diocesan calendar. It falls each year on the fourth Sunday in September.

Over the past year or so, we have done a lot of talking and a lot of listening, both as part of the Synod and as part of the Building Hope project that I launched at the beginning of 2021. The talking and the listening in themselves bring us together and are part of the building up of the Kingdom of God.

One of the things talked about in the synod meetings in the parishes was the sorrow, guilt and helplessness experienced by older parishioners at the lack of involvement of their own children with the Church and the need to reach out to young adults and children. These young adults are often the parents who must decide whether to permit their children participate in the life of our parishes. Some young parents are involved with their local parishes and do permit their children to participate in Church activities. However, some of these young parents have told us that some of their peers express misgivings about this. These parents wonder if it is safe to allow their own children to become involved in Church activities. These are the concerns of loving, responsible parents who are determined to protect their children from abuse. We need to open up a dialogue with these parents. We need to listen to their concerns, acknowledge the failures of the past, and share with them all the many ways that we seek to ensure the safety of their children. We need to find ways to share the good news with them, the good news that God loves their children and that those who work in our parishes - clerics, religious and lay people - are determined to demonstrate God's love for these children by the actions we take to ensure their safety.

In the short film we made for this year's Safeguarding Sunday, Natalie Doherty, Faith Development Worker and member of the diocesan Safeguarding Committee refers to her work as centred "on engaging with families to support faith in the home", and of walking "the wonderful journey of celebrating the sacraments". We must be ever mindful of the generosity of parents who open their families to us, and the particular responsibility that brings with it.

We should remember too, our responsibility to the vulnerable members of our community. The Church must always be a place of safety for those for whom the world may not always feel secure and welcoming.

Finally, I ask you to remember in your prayers all those who have suffered abuse.

+ Dermot Farrell