**Safeguarding statement from the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group**

 **2nd Oct 2022**

Today we celebrate the feast of the Guardian Angels. It is the Sunday when all parishes in Scotland remind our communities that we promote a ‘culture of care’, providing a safe environment and protection from harm, in line with Church policies, procedures and with legislation.

Safeguarding is a significant commitment that must be taken seriously by all.

The Church’s core safeguarding message is:

* We regard as our paramount concern the safety of children and vulnerable adults.
* We demonstrate zero tolerance of abuse. We report all allegations of abuse to the statutory authorities.
* We show compassion for all who have suffered experience of abuse.
* We acknowledge and learn from our past failings.
* We open our safeguarding procedures to independent scrutiny.
* We provide training and support to all who are responsible for safeguarding.
* Together we commit to continuous improvement in our safeguarding practice.

The Aberdeen Diocesan report summarising synod discussions included reference to “sexual *abuse and other scandals within the Church which receive a lot of publicity in the secular press and raise doubt and distrust. The Church often appears reactive and on the defensive when such issues are raised. These are serious issues which should not be covered up or explained away. Mandatory reporting to the police of all allegations of clerical child abuse is a move in the right direction, but more must be done to support those who have been abused and to purge this grave evil from the Church. Significant work is being done to improve safeguarding practice at the universal, national, and diocesan levels, but many people are not aware of current developments.”*

Today’s statement is to raise your awareness of “In God’s Image”, the Instruction on Safeguarding issued by the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland in 2018 and updated in September 2021. You can read the entire 126 pages online. This document details the responsibilities of parish priests, parish safeguarding coordinators, all volunteers, the Diocesan Safeguarding team and the national Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (SCSSA) which has a director, board members and staff to promote and support us to create and maintain safe Church environments. We put measures in place to protect children and vulnerable adults in all church settings and activities.

This means that we ensure that safeguarding risks are identified, managed and prevented. We have a robust safe recruitment procedure which includes references, training and membership of the PVG scheme. Parish priests ensure that volunteers do not commence their roles until safe recruitment procedures have been completed.

There are eight safeguarding standards in ‘In God’s Image’ and each parish completes an annual safeguarding audit, accounting for safeguarding practice in a transparent way. These audits help us to identify training needs and plan specific ways to improve safeguarding practice.

Standard 3 focuses on responding to safeguarding concerns and allegations of abuse. When alerted to information, concerns and allegations regarding the safety or welfare of child or a vulnerable adult, we respond with care and compassion. We inform the statutory authorities of all allegations of abuse that we receive. Pope Francis has said “Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.”

If anyone sitting here has any information, concerns or allegations regarding safeguarding now or in the past, please let the safeguarding team know. The details of our parish safeguarding coordinator are on the noticeboard or you can contact the Diocesan safeguarding team directly. The phone number and email details are on the noticeboard or you can make contact via the safeguarding section of the Aberdeen Diocese webpage. We are here to help and we deal sensitively and fairly with all involved. Please continue to keep in your prayers all survivors of abuse. We pray for a generosity of spirit to ensure the vulnerable are protected and for a compassionate heart so that we will reach out to those who are wounded by abuse.

Thank you for listening today and for keeping all our parish safeguarding coordinators, volunteers, priests, deacons and religious in your prayers. We thank everyone who volunteers their time, expertise and skills to build up our parish community.

.