DSW Written Service
Sunday 15/11/2026 Rev Helen Harrell
Safeguarding Sunday

Opening Prayer
Almighty, ever-loving, eternal God; whom the psalmist sought, who the prophets dreamt and had visions of, who visited Mary and Joseph, who in an angelic throng urged the shepherds to seek the baby, who placed in the sky a star that led the wise men from the east, who birthed through Mary, the baby Jesus who was laid in a manger, who suffered and gave up life as Jesus on the cross, guide us, bless us, lead us, challenge and change us, as we come before you this day. Amen

Hymn StF 351: In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save;
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain;
then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry, to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

A prayer of adoration
Holy God, in awe we gather before you, in adoration we marvel at your gifts beyond measure. We are blessed beyond imagining by your love poured out upon each of us. And yet entwined with our adoration is fear. Fear that we can't always love as you love us. Fear that we can't always give of our all. But still we come to worship and adore you and seek always to give our all. Amen.

A prayer of confession
O Lord our God, just as we are, we come and bring our sorrow and our shame and before you we offer our confession. Sorry that so often we seek to love those around us but find that we sometimes also feel hate towards them. Sorry that though we try, we seek, we yearn to live in the light of your presence, we stray and wander and see the shadows of the darkness of life. Sorry that we so want to ovey your commandments, your leading, your ways, your Word, and yet we find ourselves turning off the track, back tracking, making our own rules. Sorry that we say we are children of God, your children, committed to your way and yet we do not always live up to that challenge and commitment.
In sorrow and shame, we confess our sins, our failings, our shortcomings and we seek, O Lord our God, your forgiveness. Amen

Assurance of forgiveness:
The Lord Almighty hears our prayers, knows our innermost thoughts, desires and pains. The Lord our God hears our confession and assures us that our sins are washed away, our lives cleansed and restored, our burdens lifted. Let us then hear the word of God…my child, your sins are forgiven, go in love, go in peace. Amen.

Hymn StF 723: Who can sound the depths of sorrow

Who can sound the depths of sorrow
in the Father heart of God,
for the children we've rejected,
for the lives so deeply scarred?
And each light that we've extinguished
has brough darkness to our land:
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.

We have scorned the truth you gave us,
we have bowed to other lords,
We have sacrificed the children
on the altars of our gods.
O let truth again shine on us,
let your holy fear descend:
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.

Who can stand before your anger?
Who can face your piercing eyes?
For you love the weak and helpless,
And you hear the victim's cries.
Yes, you are a God of justice,
and your judgement surely comes;
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.

Who will stand against the violence?
Who will comfort those who mourn?
In an age of cruel rejection,
Who will build for love a home?
Come and shake us into action,
come and melt our hearts of stone:
upon your people, upon your people,
have mercy, Lord.

Bible Reading - 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Sermon – "Love Protects"

The words of 1 Corinthians 13 are very familiar. They are often read at weddings, printed on cards and quoted as one of the most beautiful descriptions of love in the Bible. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." These words describe the sort of love we all long to experience: a love that is gentle, generous, faithful and enduring. But today, as we mark Safeguarding Sunday, I want us to hear these words in a slightly different way. Because love is not simply about how we feel towards other people. Love is about how we treat them. It is about the choices we make, the things we say, the things we do, and sometimes, importantly, the things we refuse to allow to happen. The theme for Safeguarding Sunday this year is "Love protects". And that is a powerful message for the Church. We often speak about the Church as a family, a community of faith, a place where people belong. We speak about welcoming everyone, caring for one another and sharing God's love. But if we are truly going to be a community shaped by the love of Christ, then we must also be a community where people are safe. A place where children are protected. Where vulnerable adults are respected. Where people are listened to. Where nobody is made to feel frightened, threatened or powerless. Where those who have experienced harm are believed, supported and treated with compassion.

Paul begins by telling us that love is patient and kind. To be patient is to recognise that everyone has their own story, their own experiences, their own struggles and their own pace of life. To be kind is to treat people with gentleness, consideration and respect. And that is particularly important when we think about safeguarding. Every person who comes through the doors of our churches deserves to be treated with

dignity. Every child, every young person, every adult, whatever their circumstances, whatever their background, whatever their abilities. We must never assume that somebody is less important because they are young, elderly, disabled, isolated or dependent upon others. Nor should we assume that someone who appears confident and cheerful has no worries or difficulties. Safeguarding begins when we recognise the value of every individual. It means creating an atmosphere where people feel able to speak, where questions are welcomed, where boundaries are respected and where nobody is made to feel that they are being difficult simply because they have expressed a concern. Love is patient. Love is kind. And love treats every person as precious in the sight of God.

Sometimes we have a mistaken understanding of what it means to be loving. We might think that being loving means avoiding confrontation, keeping the peace, not upsetting people or refusing to believe that something unpleasant could happen within our church community. We might be tempted to protect the reputation of the church, rather than protect the people who belong to it. We might worry about causing embarrassment, creating difficulties or damaging relationships. But Paul reminds us that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Love rejoices in the truth. And sometimes love requires courage. It takes courage to notice when something is not right and to raise a concern. It takes courage to challenge behaviour that is inappropriate or harmful. And it takes courage to accept that safeguarding procedures are not simply unnecessary rules or burdensome paperwork. They exist because people matter. They are practical expressions of our commitment to protect those who may be vulnerable to harm.

Safeguarding is not about being suspicious of everyone. It is not about creating an atmosphere of fear or mistrust. It is about recognising that good intentions alone are not enough. We need appropriate boundaries, safe recruitment, proper training, clear procedures and people who know what to do when concerns arise. We need a culture in which speaking up is encouraged rather than discouraged. We can be reluctant to acknowledge that things might go wrong. We can find it difficult to accept that someone who is respected, well-known or influential might behave in ways that cause harm. The reputation of the Church must never become more important than the safety of a person. Love does not cover up wrongdoing. Love does not silence those who have been hurt. Love does not put institutional loyalty above human dignity. Everyone has a responsibility to help create a safe environment. We can all be alert. We can all be thoughtful. We can all respect boundaries. We can all listen. And we can all speak up when something does not seem right. There is also something important here about power. In every community there are differences in power and influence. Some people are in positions of authority. Some depend upon others for care and support. Some find it much harder to challenge behaviour or express their concerns. Christian love recognises those differences and refuses to exploit them. Whatever power or influence we have should be used to protect and encourage others.

Jesus himself gives us the perfect example. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus notices those whom other people overlook. He welcomes children, reaches out to those who are excluded, listens to those who are ignored and restores dignity to those who have been rejected. He does not use his authority to control or diminish people. He uses it to serve. That is the example we are called to follow. A church shaped by the love of Jesus should be a place where the vulnerable are not overlooked, where the powerless are not ignored and where everyone is given the opportunity to flourish.

Paul concludes this wonderful chapter by reminding us that faith, hope and love remain, and that the greatest of these is love. "Love never fails." Love never fails because God's love never gives up on us. It calls us to keep trying, keep learning and keep becoming the community God wants us to be - a community in which love is visible. A community where love is patient and kind. Where love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Where love is not self-seeking. Where love rejoices in the truth. Where love never fails. And if we love God, we will want our churches to reflect something of the generous, compassionate and protective love that God has shown to us. For love is not just something we say. Love is something we do.

So may our churches be places where love is more than a word, where kindness is more than a sentiment, and where protection is more than a policy. Because love protects. And that is what God's love calls us to do. Amen.

The Safeguarding Hymn

May this place be one of nurture
where we all may come to know
how your endless love sustains us
For you hold the broken hearted
till they learn to live again,
and your justice stands like mountains,

as we live and move and grow.
May we work to build your kingdom
full of truth and light and grace,
living life in all its fullness
held in one divine embrace.

From our negligence and failures
you have called us to repent,
drawing energy for action
from the voices of lament.
As the secret hurts long hidden
may at last be brought to light,
may the truth unlock the freedom
that is every person's right.

While your mercy falls like rain
When the smallest child is valued,
and the strong empower the weak,
when each human life is hallowed
and the unheard voices speak.

So with humble thanks we praise you
and we lift to you in prayer
all the people you are calling
to this ministry of care.
Give us wisdom, grace and courage,
holding fast to all that's good,
seeing Christ in one another
we will love and serve our Lord.

A Prayer for Safeguarding Sunday

Loving and gracious God, on this Safeguarding Sunday we hold before you all who have been harmed through abuse. You see every story and every wound, and your heart grieves with those who suffer. Ten years on from the Past Cases Review, we give thanks for progress made, yet remember those still struggling to heal. Bring comfort, courage and hope to all survivors, and surround them with your peace. We pray for all who work in safeguarding; for wisdom, compassion and strength in their calling. Help your church to be a place of safety and truth, where every voice is heard and every person valued. Through your healing Spirit, make us instruments of love and renewal, reflecting the light of Christ in all we do. Amen

Hymn StF 707: Make me a channel of your peace

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
and where there's doubt true faith in you:

O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
where there is darkness, only light;
and where there's sadness ever joy.

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving unto all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Blessing

And now may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. Amen