# Speaker notes

**These speaker notes are given as a guide to crafting your own sermon or talk. Use them to help reflect on the passages listed and consider how you might best communicate the message for your congregation or group.**

Unity and Diversity in the Body – 1 Corinthians 12:12–271 Corinthians is a letter from Paul to the church he established in Corinth. Paul wrote it around 53–55 AD after receiving reports that the Christian community there was struggling with the challenge of living as a community of faith and facing the reality of what it meant to be church together.

Paul uses the image of a body to help them understand how everyone, though different, has an important part to play in being church.

If we want our church to be a place that is safe for all, that values each person equally, we each have a role in making that happen.

Although our church has people with specific responsibilities for safeguarding, we each should contribute to making the environment safer for all.

In verses 22–23 Paul talks about how we treat the parts of the body that are ‘weaker’ and ‘less honorable’. In today’s language we talk about people who are more vulnerable or at risk of harm. What might this mean in the context of our church community?

It’s important to note here that all of us at some time in our lives may fall into this category, because of our age, or life circumstances.

There are a number of factors that might increase a person’s vulnerability to risk of harm or abuse and so it’s important that as churches we familiarise ourselves with what these are, and what factors might mean a person can't protect themselves or their own interests, or which could give opportunity for others to neglect, exploit or abuse them.

In verse 25 we read about the need to have equal ‘concern’ or ‘care’ for one another. This is an important Biblical teaching. But how does this relate to creating communities and cultures that are safer? It means looking out for each other. Being ready not just to spot the signs and indicators of risk and harm, but of being prepared to take action, to speak out, and report any concerns at the right time, and in the right way, to the right people.

Safeguarding is often associated with processes and procedures, background checks, training, policies etc. However, at its heart are the Christian values of loving your neighbour as yourself.

Within our church we have people with specific responsibilities for safeguarding who will follow up any concerns. However, when it comes to reducing the risk of harm or abuse happening, none of us should say, “Because I’m not a… Safeguarding Lead, Church Leader, or Children’s/Youth/Adult worker… I don’t have a role to play.” Each of us can play a vital part whatever our role. Each of us can be the eyes and ears for vulnerable people and support those who may be at risk.

In verse 26 we read about those in ‘the body’ – the church – who have suffered or who are suffering. We just need to look at our headlines to read the cases of those who have suffered abuse both within our churches and in society. How we respond to those who have experienced or suffered abuse is vital in demonstrating our love and unity. Do we champion the cause of the victim or survivor, do we support their right for justice and recompense. How do we align ourselves with those who have suffered and come alongside them as Jesus did, talking truth to power?

“…each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27 Just like the human body, which is made up of many parts all working together, we each have a part to play in helping to create places that are safer for all.

## Neighbour – Mark 12:28–31

Here we are again – another Safeguarding Sunday, another day to look at ourselves and our practices, another day to reflect. When we see the headlines and hear the stories of how the Church has got it wrong and people have been harmed we may ask ourselves – how did we allow so much evil to happen? That’s one way of looking at it. Or we can dig deeper and unpack what safeguarding really is. How much is safeguarding intrinsic in our Christian lives and how much is just about being a Christian?

We’re here today to celebrate the things we’re already doing to make our church a safer place, to consider what more can and must be done, but primarily to recognise how central to our faith safeguarding is. It’s so easy to get caught up in procedures, form filling, box ticking. And that’s not to say that it isn’t necessary and worthwhile – our systems and processes are one of the biggest reasons churches are safer today than ever. But let’s consider too that being Christ-like in our approach means ensuring that we take care of everyone, consider others, protect the weak and the vulnerable – and have a heart for the wellbeing of all God’s creation.

In Mark 12 we hear Jesus refer to the ‘most important commandment’ (Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength) and without stopping for breath going straight on to say the second is ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. But importantly, Jesus then says, “There is no commandment greater than these”. Notice the grammar – Jesus does not say there are no commandments greater than these – he doesn’t use the plural; he treats both as one commandment. Jesus is saying that we cannot just choose the former without embracing the latter. In other words, for Jesus there is no divide – we can’t give our all to God, to love Him completely and then forget about the rest. No, Jesus ties loving God and loving our neighbour inextricably together. Our love for God is incomplete unless that spreads to loving others too. And, let’s be honest, that’s what safeguarding is all about. Loving our neighbour as ourselves. Wanting for our neighbour exactly what we want for ourselves.

That is what is (or should be) at the heart of safeguarding for us as Christians – loving others as we love God. When we think about it, there’s so much about church that is about guarding people’s safety. The friendly call, the pastoral visit, getting shopping, making sure the vulnerable get home safely, bereavement support, hospital visits, toddler groups, children’s clubs, home communion – the list goes on. Its all about caring for others, making sure they’re okay – loving our neighbour! Yes of course, safeguarding is also about making sure the people that act on behalf of the church are appropriate to do so – and that’s crucial because, sadly, not everybody has God’s love as a motive. But what we do for our neighbours is about love, about making sure they’re safe – taking care of the vulnerable. What does it mean to keep people safe? It’s about building a healthy culture in our church that encourages honesty and openness, where, for example, each individual is respected, valued and nurtured. Where every individual is allowed to ask questions and disagree in a safe and respectful manner and where leaders are nurturing and nurtured. It’s also shown when safeguarding practice is embedded in every part of the organisation. So let’s consider that in the wider context. We will all be vulnerable at some stage in our lives, some for longer and more obviously than others. And we are tasked with being aware of other people’s needs and vulnerabilities. As a community we must respond. As Christians we must love our neighbour in whatever way it takes. As a church we must ensure that it is done safely.

John Wesley had a wonderful way of summing up these words of Jesus’ when he said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can”. Doing that with a heart for God, doing that with a heart for the vulnerable, doing that in the safest possible way. Well, that’s safeguarding.

## Thinking contextually – Isaiah 41:10–13

“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

These words of comfort were spoken over a people who would find themselves in captivity, delivered into the hands of Assyrians and Babylonians because of the state in which they had gotten themselves into. They had ignored the words of the Lord spoken through his prophets about the reality of their relationship with God. Nobody likes to be told bad news about themselves, but because God’s people refused to listen, they would find themselves in captivity, as God had foretold.

The word of the prophet isn’t simply about what will happen, it’s about what has happened and what is happening. Sometimes that’s an uncomfortable truth.

What has happened and is happening in our churches is a sad account of woeful abuse of those who are not in a position to defend themselves from it.

6% of the 5,440 survivors of abuse who supplied evidence to the recent government Inquiry into Child abuse said their abusers were trusted officials of the established church. In the space of 15 years, 2003–2018, one insurer handled 217 claims relating to child sexual abuse in one denomination.

Much less those who cause it, but could step in to help prevent it, the systems of our churches have historically been inadequate to hear the voice of the victim and survivor, to be willing to believe that trusted men and women in positions of leadership could perpetrate such acts. In one of the most influential cases of our time in which multiple agencies were condemned by Lord Laming for their failure to act, Victoria Climbie’s death in 1999 was something in which a church could also have intervened and protected a vulnerable child.

In our contemporary Church, while we celebrate the vast improvements on safeguarding awareness, policies and procedures in place to protect the vulnerable, we see a new trend emerging of harmful cultures, of stories which reveal the leaders who have neglected to view and treat their peers and their people in the image of God in which they were created – where, as in one case, ‘if they aren’t on the bus, they’re thrown under the bus’.

The hope for God’s people who are humble enough to take note of the state of the Church, which he reveals to us, and to turn to the Lord is found in passages like Isaiah 41:10 and 13. The Lord will help us.

What does God require of us moving forward? Micah 6:8 tells us: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

## Become like little children – Matthew 18:1–5

Jesus’ attitude towards children was revolutionary, affectionate and respectful in a culture that devalued children. In Matthew 18 he uses a child as an example to his disciples that: ‘Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’ Jesus uses children as examples of those who are dependent, trustful, simple, open, teachable and excitable. But Jesus’ view of children was not sentimental or romanticised. He had brothers and sisters. He no doubt encountered the Nazareth school bully! He had to learn obedience through being subject to his earthly parents. However, the way we treat children is very revealing and Jesus tells us that the way we enter the Kingdom is by becoming like a little child again.

In Matthew 19 children are brought to Jesus for him to pray for them, but the disciples rebuke them. Jesus replies by saying, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

How does Jesus want us to treat and welcome children in today’s culture? Are there ways in which we hinder children from coming to Jesus?

How does he want us to change so that we become more like children in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven?

The Kingdom of God is a paradox that can look strange to people outside Church.

The Kingdom is not for the strong; it’s for the weak.

The Kingdom is not for the rich; it’s for the poor.

The Kingdom is not for the powerful; it’s for the powerless.

The Kingdom is not for the proud; it’s for the meek.

The Kingdom is not for adults; it’s for children.

Jesus encourages us to protect children, involve children, listen to children, and cultivate a childlike faith.

That means building a culture that vales the safety and nurture of children and strives to create places of safety that protect children and other vulnerable groups from harm. This also means learning from the past and from where the Church and others have got it wrong. It means working and operating in new, safer ways, and being open to listen and following the guidance of others so that we might make our church a safer place for all God’s people