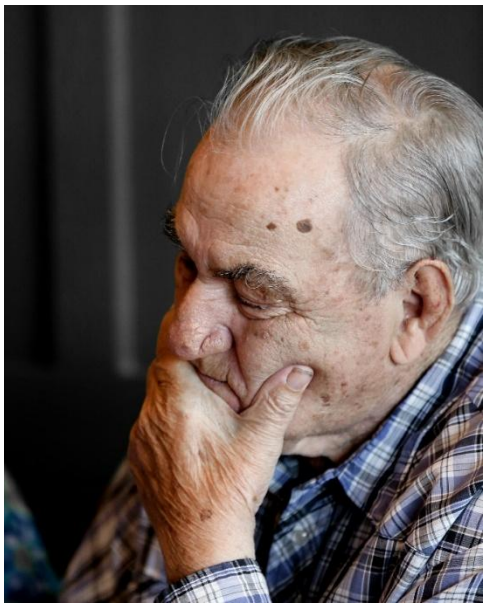
SAFEGUARDING 2026 – WHAT I CAN DO?



Dear Parishioner,

Today – 15th November – is Safeguarding Sunday.
Please read this little pamphlet.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the practical action we all take to help people be safe and to prevent harm. In a church context, it's about creating a culture where all children, young people, and adults can worship, belong, and explore their faith together without fear, pressure or abuse. At St Mary's we strive to be a place where concerns about our well-being are taken seriously and responded to well.

In everyday terms, safeguarding means that we all:

- Protect children and adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation and mistreatment
- Prevent harm to a person's health, wellbeing or development
- Notice early when something "isn't right" and offering support before a situation worsens
- Respond appropriately when there are concerns, so that people get the help and protection they need
- Create a culture of safety, so people can flourish in safe, respectful relationships and environments

Why safeguarding matters at St Mary's Woodbridge

Our Church is built around trust, welcome, community and service. These are all positive and powerful strengths, but they also can create risk - when boundaries are unclear, power and authority is misused, or concerns people express are minimised.

Safeguarding matters because:

- Abuse can happen anywhere, including in faith settings
- People may disclose harm to themselves in church because it feels to be a safe and trusted place
- Good safeguarding practice protects everyone – those who may be harmed, those who have been harmed, and those who serve and lead
- It is a legal requirement for churches to have effective safeguarding procedures in place. For St Mary's this means that not having safeguarding measures will leave people at risk and may place the church and its leaders on the wrong side of the law

How does it work?

Safeguarding operates through someone noticing something "odd" or witnessing abusive behaviour. They report this quickly to the local Safeguarding Officer, who passes the concern onto the Diocese or, if there is an extreme risk, may advise calling the police.



Safeguarding is not about suspicion or bureaucracy. It is a form of care and taking responsibility so that people can participate confidently and safely in church activities.

Although safeguarding usually is associated with children's and youth work, it also includes reporting concerns about vulnerable adults. We all become vulnerable at certain times of life because of things like our age, physical or mental health, addiction or other life circumstances. At St Mary's Woodbridge many attendees are retired, so we need to think about frail elderly people and their safeguarding needs.

What should I do?

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The simplest starting point is to know what a concern is and to notice it; to speak up early; to refer your concern to the Safeguarding Officer. If you attend church regularly or participate in any activity at St Mary's (for example - choir, bell-ringing, church shop, flower arranging) you must do some online safeguarding training. The Basic Awareness course takes about an hour and has to be renewed every three years.

Thanks for reading this. Please phone me on the number below if you have any questions.

Best wishes,

JEREMY HAWKSLEY – Benefice Safeguarding Officer

Tel: 07771 758971

8th November 2026

P.S. Overleaf is a story which you will find interesting

A story about an abuse survivor

How the Church has changed / is changing

"The vicar and several others spoke with a strong conviction about keeping people safe in church; I had never heard church leaders speak with so much passionate commitment before. No-one knew it, but I was a victim of church related abuse. The service reached deep into my heart and for the first time in 30 years, I saw a demonstration of safeguarding that communicated, **'you really matter and what happened to you really matters'.**

I approached the vicar after the service and said I had experienced abuse in a previous church. She didn't ask questions, she didn't say we should talk, she gently signposted me to a professional organisation and encouraged me to speak to someone who would understand and provide support.

I was somewhat surprised by the simplicity of her response and the profound impact it had on me. In that moment, her actions communicated the seriousness of my situation; **she said I believe you without words; I felt seen, heard and understood.**

This wasn't the first time I had disclosed the abuse. On several previous occasions, I had spoken with church leaders, divulging in greater detail what had happened, but never felt seen or believed in the way this vicar had done. Her response to this brief disclosure **shifted me from helpless victim to feeling confident and empowered.**

I began to face into my painful past because I knew it was the only way I could find peace and reconcile with the 18-year old me whose future was stolen by years of abuse. With guidance and support from various qualified and trauma-informed individuals, both Christian and non-Christian, I made the decision to report my abuse to the police."