Message from Bishop Robert
29 September 2026

Last week I had the privilege of preaching at St Paul's Cathedral, at a special service recognising and celebrating the ministry of Parish Safeguarding Officers from across the Church of England. It was a moving occasion, bringing together those who give so much of themselves in service of creating safer churches and communities.

The service reflected on the words of the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?" Alongside Mary's song, the Magnificat, and Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25, these readings remind us that safeguarding is not simply an administrative function of the Church. It is rooted in the very character and mission of God.

Too often safeguarding can be reduced to policies, procedures and training. Of course, these things matter. They help create accountability and provide the structures necessary to keep people safe. Yet safeguarding begins at a much deeper level: with the conviction that every person is made in the image of God and possesses a dignity that must be honoured, protected and nurtured.

At its heart, safeguarding is about human flourishing. It is one of the ways the Church participates in God's desire that every person should be able to grow, belong and thrive. Throughout scripture we encounter a God who hears the cries of those who suffer, protects the vulnerable and calls communities into relationships marked by trust, truth and justice. Safeguarding is therefore not a task on the margins of Christian life. It is central to our calling as the people of God.

One of the most powerful themes of the service was Jesus' identification with those who are vulnerable: "When you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me." In caring for others, listening well, responding to concerns and creating safer communities, we are not simply undertaking a responsibility; we are encountering Christ himself.

This is why Parish Safeguarding Officers deserve our deepest gratitude. Much of their work goes unseen. They ask careful questions, maintain records, support good practice and work closely with diocesan safeguarding teams. Often they stand alongside people in difficult circumstances, listening to painful stories and helping navigate complex situations. The emotional and spiritual demands can be significant.

Many of the most important things Parish Safeguarding Officers do are things that nobody notices because problems are prevented before they arise. Their ministry helps

create communities where children are protected, where vulnerable people can participate fully, where trust can grow and where fear is replaced by confidence and belonging.

Like many who serve in safeguarding, they occasionally encounter resistance or misunderstanding. Yet they continue because they know the difference this work makes. Safeguarding changes lives. It enables people to participate safely in the life of the Church and reflects the values of God's kingdom.

As we continue to strengthen safeguarding across our own Diocese of Gloucester, I want to echo the message I shared at St Paul's Cathedral: thank you. To every Parish Safeguarding Officer, volunteer, churchwarden, clergy colleague and member of our diocesan safeguarding team, thank you for your commitment, care and faithfulness.

Your ministry is not simply an organisational necessity. It is a profound expression of the Gospel. Through your service, churches become places where people can flourish, where the vulnerable are valued, and where the love and justice of God are made visible in the world.