

SERMON

The following was delivered as a dialogue by Revd Sandy Clarke and Peter Neukom (PSO) at St. Thomas Church 16th November 2025

- **SANDY** What is your Background
 - I have been coming to St Thomas Church with Sung shin and Rachel for about twenty years – so not one of the veterans ! Prior to that attended St George's Badshot Lea, but we live just down the road and we were looking for Junior Church for Rachel
 - My daughter Rachel now a young lady
 - I retired during the lockdown in 2020 following a long career in IT, developing software in the heady days of the 20th century and latterly working in management and accounting
- **SANDY** What is your role and why are you doing this
 - I took on the role of Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) about two years ago, following a period (that many of you might remember) as Churchwarden. This gives me an important part in ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the Parish.
 - I felt the need to promote care for the people of our churches in practical ways and play a part in repairing the damage to the reputation of the church in our society
 - Particularly aware of the pressures and influences that young people are exposed to in our modern society and saw the role of the church in countering those factors and providing a positive environment for our young people
 - Those of you who worked with me as Churchwarden will be aware of my fondness for process and procedure and rigorous documentation. I can bring some of those traits to the role
- **SANDY** How does the role contribute to making people safe
 - I provide a single point of focus for efforts to keep children and vulnerable adults safe in the Parish; it is my photo and contact details on the wall of each of the places of worship. Safety is everyone's responsibility but it falls to me to try to maintain awareness among the church community and keep the issues of safeguarding in our minds as we work with children and young people.
 - I report to the PCC and Safeguarding is a point for discussion at every meeting of the PCC

- Ultimately, if there are concerns or allegations it will be me responding and managing communications with those involved, liaising closely with the full-time Diocesan staff. There is a diagram in the lantern that shows how this process works to help keep us safe
- **SANDY** Why is it important
 - Obviously the church has a problematic history in this area. Not only do we need to ensure that our community is safe but we also need to help repair the damage to the reputation of the church.
 - The Church itself is in a vulnerable position; we are an open, welcoming and forgiving community in which adults do mix with children and young people.
 - As Christians we are particularly called to care for the weak and disenfranchised in our community and Safeguarding represents an opportunity to be a positive influence on our society
- **SANDY** What do we have in place
 - Starts with the Safeguarding Policy for the Parish. This is annually approved by the PCC and is available on the website and in hardcopy in the office. This is based heavily on national and Diocesan guidance
 - The Diocese monitors our compliance with guidance through the comprehensive Parish Dashboard
 - We ensure that personnel in the Parish are suitably trained for the roles that they perform. The training is provided nationally through the CofE and needs to be refreshed every three years. We have about 70 people with some level of certified training (usually three courses) and it's a significant part of my role to ensure that the training is up to date. We recently (September) delivered a well attended workshop available to all our church members to improve awareness
 - All relevant personnel are also subject to DBS checks appropriate to the roles that they perform. This is a process to discern any relevant criminal or police records. Again, these checks are refreshed every three years and we have about 65 people who have these certifications.
 - There are specific risk assessments for the children's activities operated by the church and we use specific recruitment processes to help ensure that children and young people are kept safe
- **SANDY** Standup those with training and DBS Checks ?
- **SANDY** Conclusion

- There is a lot of process and procedure in place to help us keep everybody safe. Training and DBS Checks are important components in our safeguarding regime but they only represent the prerequisites for establishing a safe environment. If policy and procedure is in place then it is important that we follow it. Overall awareness and vigilance is crucial and that is that is something for everyone in the church to contribute to. If you have concerns please be sure to speak to the PSO or clergy.