

SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

in the Catholic Church in Scotland

JUNE 2026



“Actions speak louder than words”

Safeguarding Day for Religious, 14th May 2026

THEME: ‘Moving Safeguarding from policy into cultural change’

Participants at the **2026 Day for Religious** were invited by Sarah Ward to reflect on how they can “move from intention to impact, from aspiration to lived reality, and from statements to culture”.

Speaking from her experience of working with Religious communities in England & Wales, Sarah provided input and facilitated group discussions on key aspects of Safeguarding.

She assured everyone that, just as Religious life has always been rooted in integrity (the alignment of belief, behaviour, and witness) Safeguarding is no different. She stressed that, while Safeguarding policies, handbooks, and statements matter, they are simply the scaffolding. *“What truly protects people is the daily, consistent, sometimes unseen actions that communicate safety, compassion, and accountability.”*

She explained that, while policies bring clarity, consistency, and accountability, it is **culture** that determines whether those policies are followed, ignored, or quietly avoided.



Sarah Ward

Sarah acknowledged that “compliance” in safeguarding is important because it ensures that minimum standards are met. But safeguarding rooted in Gospel values asks for more. It asks for culture - a way of being that is instinctive, relational, and shared. Culture is shaped by:

- how we speak about safeguarding when no one is watching
- how we respond to concerns that feel uncomfortable or inconvenient
- how we welcome questions, scrutiny, and challenge
- how we hold ourselves and one another accountable with kindness and clarity.

“Culture,” said Sarah, “is not created by one person; it is created by everyone. And it is strengthened every time someone chooses transparency over defensiveness, learning over fear, and responsibility over assumption.”

Participants discussed how 3 groups - leaders, communities, volunteers and lay collaborators - can help to move safeguarding “from something we have to do, to something we are”.

Sarah ended with these words of encouragement:

“Safeguarding is not something we do because we have to. It is something we do because it is right. Because it is just. Because it is holy. Because it reflects the heart of God.”

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Safeguarding Day for Religious

CHRIST THE KING CHURCH HALL in Kings Park, Glasgow was the venue for the Safeguarding Day for Religious on 14th May 2026.



Before lunch, Bishop Hugh Gilbert O.S.B. was the main Celebrant of Holy Mass on the Solemnity of the Assumption.

“Moving Safeguarding from policy into cultural change”

The resources listed below can be accessed here on the SCSSA website:
<https://www.scssa.org.uk/Learning/2026-Religious-Safeguarding-Day>

VIDEO CLIPS

A number of short video clips that could stimulate reflection and discussion in various settings.



01. Introducing Sarah Ward

Sarah Ward introduces herself and outlines her background and experience.

(3 mins 03 secs.)



02. Culture & Leadership

Sarah provides input on 'Safeguarding Culture & Leadership'.

(13 mins 37 secs.)



03. Reflecting on Leadership

Participants share insights following discussion of 'Safeguarding Culture & Leadership'.

(8 mins 8 secs.)



04. Safeguarding Communities

Sarah's input and discussion of some aspects of Safeguarding and how they affect religious living in community.

(15 mins 40 secs.)



05. Safeguarding Volunteers

Sarah's input and discussion of the importance of Volunteers and their Safeguarding roles in communities.

(13 mins 49 secs.)

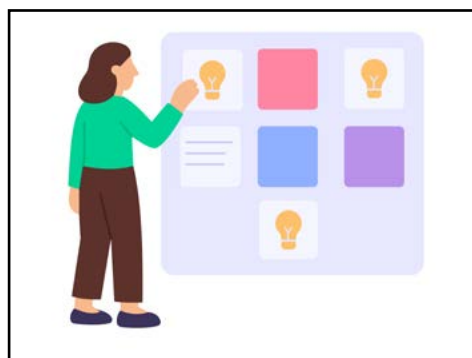


06. Safeguarding scenarios

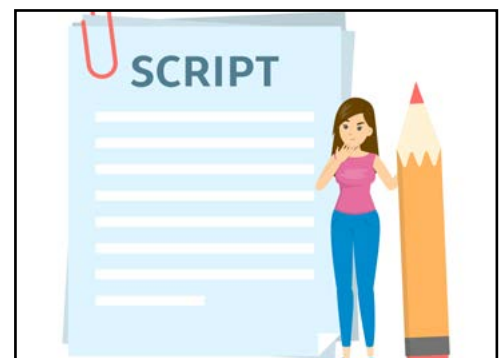
TO FOLLOW

OTHER RESOURCES

You can download these resources by clicking on the title of each resource or by using the link to the SCSSA website shown at the top of this page.



Main Presentation Slides



Sarah's core text

Clergy Consultation

Preliminary feedback from Martin Pearson, Kinharvie

The deadline for the recent 'Supporting Clergy with Safeguarding' survey has now passed, and we would like to thank everyone who took part.

We received **156** completed responses from **534** active clergy members, representing a response rate of **29.2%**. The survey forms the first stage of the SCSSA's work to better understand how clergy can be most effectively supported and resourced in carrying out their safeguarding responsibilities.

The purpose of the survey was not simply to gather opinions about safeguarding. It was designed to help build a clearer picture of the practical realities clergy are facing, the challenges they encounter, and the kinds of support that would help them respond to safeguarding situations with confidence. While the detailed analysis is still underway, several important themes are already emerging.

Emerging themes

Perhaps the most striking finding is the wide range of ways safeguarding is understood and experienced across clergy. Some respondents described safeguarding primarily in terms of policies, procedures, reporting concerns, and responding to incidents. Others saw safeguarding as woven through almost every aspect of ministry and community life, including relationships, authority, accompaniment, boundaries, culture, and everyday interactions.

Alongside this, many responses pointed to uncertainty about how safeguarding should be applied in practice. Respondents frequently referred to questions about policies, reporting expectations, responsibilities, decision-making, and how to respond to challenging pastoral situations. In particular, there appears to be significant uncertainty about where ordinary pastoral care ends and formal safeguarding responsibility begins.

The survey is also beginning to provide a clearer picture of the kinds of support and resources clergy would find most valuable. One strong theme was that difficult safeguarding situations often arise unexpectedly. Many respondents highlighted the importance of being able to access experienced safeguarding professionals quickly for practical advice and guidance when these situations occur.

The responses also highlighted the reality of already stretched workloads. Lack of time and capacity was frequently identified as a barrier to attending workshops and additional training events. This suggests that accessible and responsive forms of support may be just as important as formal training provision.



Finally, the survey revealed the emotional weight that safeguarding can carry. Fear of getting things wrong appeared regularly throughout the responses, alongside anxiety about handling situations appropriately and concern about being associated, in the eyes of wider society, with safeguarding failures and scandals within the Church.

At the same time, respondents strongly affirmed the importance of safeguarding and its role in creating safer, healthier, and more accountable communities.

Taken together, these early findings are already helping the SCSSA to build a clearer picture of how clergy can be supported to navigate safeguarding responsibilities within the realities of everyday ministry and community life.

The survey was always intended to be the first stage of the work. Over the coming months, these findings will be explored further through focus groups and one-to-one conversations with clergy as well as those with other relevant experience and knowledge (for example survivors, theologians, canon lawyers, psychologists and safeguarding experts). We encourage all clergy, whether you responded to the survey or not, to consider participating in this ongoing process. More information on how to participate will be available shortly, and a full report will be published once the wider consultation process has been completed.

Thank you again to everyone who contributed so openly and thoughtfully to this important process.

You can find out more about Kinharvie and its work here: <https://www.kinharvie.org.uk>

Interested in helping to shape a safer future?

The SCSSA is seeking expressions of interest from individuals who feel able to contribute to our efforts to develop a more effective system to monitor the compliance of the Catholic Church in Scotland with safeguarding standards. We are establishing a working group to support development of a new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) that aims to improve how safeguarding practices are monitored across Catholic Church bodies in Scotland.

The **QAF Working Group** will offer a meaningful opportunity to contribute to safeguarding improvement at a national level and help to develop and implement a robust review process that ensures safeguarding practice is consistent, survivor-informed and embeds a culture of continuous improvement.

At its heart, this work is about people: ensuring that children, young people and vulnerable adults are protected; that survivors have a voice and are heard and supported; and that all involved in Church life understand their responsibilities and are supported to meet them well.

Why this work matters

Safeguarding is more than compliance with policies. It is about culture, trust and care. It is critical to embed the lived experience of victims/survivors, trauma-informed practice and compassion into safeguarding systems, and for practitioners to know what good safeguarding practice looks like. The QAF will also help to ensure fairness, proportionality and clear communication for all those affected by safeguarding processes.

Who we are looking for

We welcome expressions of interest from a broad range of individuals. This includes victims and survivors of abuse and survivor advocates who feel able to share their lived experience to shape safer systems for others. We also encourage interest from parishioners and volunteers with safeguarding awareness or lived experience of Church life, as their perspectives will help ensure new processes are meaningful at a local level.

We are keen to involve clergy and members of religious institutes, as well as safeguarding personnel working within dioceses, parishes or Catholic organisations. Individuals with experience in areas of work where quality assurance processes are embedded would benefit the group, although you do not need to be an expert. What matters most is your commitment to safeguarding and your willingness to contribute thoughtfully and respectfully.



What the QAF working group will do

Members will be asked to contribute to the design of a new QAF, ensuring it is survivor-informed, practical, and aligned with national safeguarding standards. The group will help to review and shape the materials and processes that will be used to monitor and report on safeguarding practice by providing insights from their own experiences.

Time commitment and support

The group will meet periodically over several months, with meetings held online or in person as appropriate. Sessions will be structured and supported by SCSSA staff. The group will operate as a task-and-finish group, expected to run for six to nine months. Contributions at an individual level will also be acceptable should working in a group setting not be appropriate for individual circumstances.

How to express your interest

If you would like to be considered for membership of the QAF Working Group, please complete the online form that can be found by scanning the **QR code** or by using this link: <https://bit.ly/3S9Tquz>



You may share whatever personal information as you feel comfortable with. We particularly encourage survivors and volunteers to come forward. The voices of all members will matter and all will be treated with sensitivity and respect.

N.B. The closing date for submitting expressions of interest is:
Friday 31st July 2026.

Safeguarding Self-Evaluation

The latest Safeguarding Self-Evaluation exercise (covering data collected in 2024) analysed information submitted by all 8 dioceses¹, 61 religious congregations, and 27 Catholic organisations. A summarised analysis was presented at a recent SCSSA Board meeting, with the full analysis being made available in late June 2026.

¹ Parish data was not collected in this self-evaluation to accommodate the clergy survey carried out in January 2026.

Summary

The interim analysis presents a picture of well-established structures supporting the safeguarding responsibilities attached to the extensive regulated activity undertaken across the Church. This is characterised by strong engagement, established structures, and generally effective case management. The analysis shows “high levels of engagement” and the dedicated commitment of safeguarding personnel across all sectors. However, this exercise, as it did last year, highlights some areas for continued development, particularly in achieving consistency in data recording and the integrity of information management attached to the handling of cases.

Some difficulties

Some dioceses reported that certain information sought was difficult to trace due to the passage of time between the data being recorded and being sought in the self-evaluation exercise. A view was also expressed that inconsistencies and a lack of clarity around definitions led to some difficulties. This suggests that while the reported figures provide a useful overview, they should be interpreted with some caution, as underlying inconsistencies may affect completeness and accuracy. It is for this reason that the development of the new Quality Assurance Framework and a universal case management system will be critical in bringing about consistency and achieving full confidence in the oversight and scrutiny of safeguarding practice in Scotland.



Complexities

Across the Catholic dioceses in Scotland, it was reported that there are **392 parishes**, with **379** supported by a Parish Safeguarding Coordinator (PSC), reflecting near-universal coverage. Some diocesan structural arrangements result in Parish structures that can be complex, with **73** parishes comprising multiple church buildings and a total of 45 PSCs who oversee safeguarding across more than one Church. This can be challenging for some of the Parish Priests and volunteer PSCs and makes the future development of training for PSCs and Clergy all the more important.

Personnel

Safeguarding activity across the whole of the safeguarding structure within the Catholic Church in Scotland is supported by a significant body of personnel, including **464 employees** and **7861 volunteers**. These figures demonstrate the hugely impressive scale of the dedication and commitment shown by volunteers in their work with children and vulnerable adults. High levels of PVG compliance are evident across all parts of the Church supporting the finding that the amount of PVGs is “generally reflective of staff numbers,” and that the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers is a robust process across the Church bodies. This is despite some administrative difficulties and delays linked to the introduction of new processes attached to the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020. The numbers of reported safeguarding allegations, vary across the Church bodies, but remain relatively low overall. **Dioceses reported 13 new safeguarding allegations**, with 9 of those cases being resolved in the 2024 calendar year. **Religious congregations reported 16 new allegations**, resolving half within the year, while **Catholic organisations reported 3 allegations**, all resolved within 2024.

Interim analysis of 2025 submissions

Variability of Safeguarding processes

High levels of PVG compliance, particularly among employees, and the resolution of most cases within the year indicate a strong operational framework. However, a key theme emerging from this, and the previous analysis, is that some variability exists across the Church's safeguarding processes and case management structures. While dioceses, congregations, and organisations all operate safeguarding systems, these "vary widely" in terms of approach, resources, and co-ordination, with some diocesan safeguarding leads reporting significant workload pressures.

Challenges and opportunities

Finally, the analysis highlights broader structural challenges, and opportunities to overcome those challenges, such as consideration being given to the deployment of additional operational resources at the centre to support safeguarding activity across the dioceses. The analysis suggests that the absence of

more operational co-ordination at a national level and shared information systems is a significant risk that limits effective information-sharing, trend analysis, and consistent practice across dioceses and organisations. It is the view of the SCSSA that attention to these areas is highly important to achieving further improvements in the provision of safeguarding services across the Church.

Strong foundations

Overall, the analysis paints a positive picture of an effective, but developing, safeguarding system where those involved in providing the services are committed to ensuring children and vulnerable adults are able to enjoy Church activities in a safe environment. Strong foundations are clearly in place, but improvements in data quality, consistency, coordination, and risk measurement will be essential to ensuring a more robust and unified safeguarding framework across all parts of the Church in Scotland.

Online Safety WEBINAR

In the most recent SCSSA webinar, D.C. Mark Gordon of Police Scotland's Cyber and Fraud unit provided some key points of advice on 'Online Safety' including:

- password security,
- leaving digital footprints,
- privacy settings on social media platforms.

You can watch the webinar recording here:

<https://bit.ly/4nUzCHf> and view the presentation slides here: <https://bit.ly/4xd3Vx8>



5 Top Takeaways

01

Strong separate **Passwords** using **Three Random Words**.

02

Set up **2-Step Verification**

03

Think about your **digital footprint** before posting. Once something is sent or posted you lose control of it.

04

Beware when asked to click links or provide personal information.

05

Block and Report to social media platforms. **Report to Police Scotland**.

Safeguarding Training News



PSC TRAINING UPDATE

All dioceses are now in possession of a brand new, CPD-accredited PSC training package, complete with practical accompanying resources. This has been a substantial piece of work which would not have been possible without the input from many Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinators from around the country, who completed a survey, attended online focus groups, and reviewed draft versions of the resources. The Safeguarding Training Advisory Group (STAG) have worked for over a year to refine and trial the package at various stages of its development. Feedback from PSCs is being invited as it is rolled out. Each diocese has been invited to consider developing an implementation plan to ensure that all PSCs have access to this up-to-date training and its accompanying resources. Please contact your diocese for further information in the first instance.

REVISION OF INDUCTION TRAINING (2024)

Induction Training is due to be reviewed in June 2026. A subgroup of STAG has explored what requires updating, such as including Pope Leo XIV in the introductory slides and updating information on SCSSA Communications. The table below demonstrates overall volunteer satisfaction with the content of the training. (Please note that these figures only represent training sessions where the embedded QR code has been used to collate evaluations). Trainers are invited to [email helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk](mailto:helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk) by the end of June with any aspect of Induction Training you want considered for review. It is anticipated that the updated version will be CPD-accredited and circulated for use in autumn 2026.

TOTAL NO.	VERY GOOD	GOOD	INDIFFERENT	POOR	VERY POOR
581	86%	13%	0.67%	0.33%	0%

Dates for your diary

- ➔ **International Safeguarding Conference** Live-streaming link: linktr.ee/ISCYoutube
Rome 16th - 19th June 2026
- ➔ **STAG Development Day**
Saturday 5th September 2026
- ➔ **National Safeguarding Conference**
Saturday 7th November 2026
- ➔ **Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse**
Friday 12th February 2027
- ➔ **Training day for Religious Safeguarding Link Co-ordinators**
(date to be confirmed)



SCSSA Webinar being planned (date to be confirmed)

- How MAPPA processes may impact on Safeguarding in dioceses**

This newsletter provides information about the work of the SCSSA in monitoring the safeguarding practice of the Catholic Church in Scotland. If you have suggestions for topics to be covered in future issues, please email these to: comms@scssa.org.uk