

Safeguarding Sunday 2026

The Catholic Church in Australia marks Safeguarding Sunday (formerly Child Protection Sunday) on the second Sunday of September each year – at the conclusion of National Child Protection Week.

On Safeguarding Sunday, we pray for those who have been abused, their families and supporters. We recognise and apologise for the harm done by anyone in Church settings and acknowledge the vulnerability of some within our parishes and communities.

We recommit to practices that support survivors and make the Catholic Church and its ministries the safest possible place for children and people at risk. Rebuilding trust and confidence in the Church requires constant work and vigilance.

This year the theme is **Love Protects** and the readings show us that real love is not passive goodwill. Rather it actively shields the vulnerable, tells the truth, and never lets silence stand in for safety.

Prayers for Safeguarding Sunday 2026

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time — 13 September 2026

Theme: “Love Protects” (1 Corinthians 13)

Readings: Sirach 27:30–28:7 · Psalm 103 · Romans 14:7-9 · Matthew 18:21-35

A note on the Readings and Theme

This Sunday’s Gospel is the parable of the unforgiving servant, and the first reading warns against nursing wrath. Read simply, these texts are about mercy, however, read with a safeguarding context, they need to be interpreted with care. No one should ever use “forgive seventy-seven times” to pressure an abuse survivor to forgive on a timetable, to excuse an abuser, or to keep silence about harm.

The forgiveness that these readings point to is God's own patient mercy toward us. It doesn't ask victims to release perpetrators from truth, consequence, or justice.

The "Love Protects" theme, drawn from 1 Corinthians 13, gives us the right lens for these readings. Saint Paul doesn't describe love as a feeling but as a set of actions: patient, kind, not self-seeking, not easily angered, quick to bear and protect. That is safeguarding in a sentence.

Psalm 103 shows us what this protecting love looks like from God's side: *slow to anger, and rich in compassion*, a God who "redeems your life from destruction." Put together, the Readings for Safeguarding Sunday and the theme say the same thing: real love is not passive goodwill. Rather it actively shields the vulnerable, tells the truth, and never lets silence stand in for safety.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, you are kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion. Your love is patient and kind; it does not seek its own interest; it is not easily angered; it bears all things and always protects. As we gather this Safeguarding Sunday under the theme "*Love Protects*," open our eyes to see where we have failed to protect, open our ears to hear the voices of those who have been harmed, and open our hearts to the patient important work of keeping our people safe

Make our parish a community where children are cherished, where young people are respected, where older and isolated parishioners are not forgotten, where those living with disability or illness are truly included, and where every vulnerable person among us is seen, valued, and kept safe in body, mind, and spirit.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the Faithful

Celebrant: Trusting in the Lord who is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion, and remembering that love always protects, we bring our prayers before God.

For the Church throughout the world that every diocese and parish may build cultures of vigilance and honesty, living out the truth that safeguarding is not bureaucracy but love in action.

Response: *Lord, in your mercy, - hear our prayer.*

For those who have experienced abuse For all who have been harmed within the Church or anywhere else: for healing of memory and body, for communities that believe them, and for the patience to grieve and rebuild in their own time and their own way.

Response: *Lord, in your mercy, - hear our prayer.*

For children and young people in our parish That every child and young person among us may be treasured and protected, and that every adult who works or volunteers with them be trained, checked, and accountable.

Response : *Lord, in your mercy,- hear our prayer.*

For vulnerable adults in our parish community For those who are elderly, isolated, living with disability, mental illness, or dementia, or otherwise at risk: that love may reach them through our care, our visits, and our attentiveness.

Response: *Lord, in your mercy, - hear our prayer.*

For those who protect us: For safeguarding officers, catechists, youth leaders, carers, and volunteers: give them courage to act on concerns, wisdom to recognise danger, and the support of the whole community in their vital, often unseen work.

Response *Lord, in your mercy, - hear our prayer.*

For those who have caused harm That truth and justice may always be our first response; and that any path toward repentance be walked only alongside genuine accountability and the safety of others.

Response *Lord, in your mercy,- hear our prayer.*

For our own parish community That we may be a people quick to listen and slow to dismiss, ready to report concerns without fear, and unwilling ever to let silence protect the powerful at the expense of the vulnerable — a community where love truly protects.

Response *Lord, in your mercy, - hear our prayer.*

Celebrant: Merciful God, you hear the cry of the vulnerable before we do. Receive these prayers and make us instruments of your protecting love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Commitment — “Love Protects” (the end of Mass)

God of compassion, you know each of us by name and hold every child close to your heart. Your love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not rude or self-seeking; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and it always protects.

Today we renew our commitment to safeguarding in our parish: to listen when someone finds the courage to speak, to act without delay when there is a concern, to tell the truth even when it costs us, to never to confuse mercy with silence, and to reach out in practical care to those most easily overlooked - the children, the newcomer, the housebound, the elderly, the person living alone, the person with a disability, and anyone made vulnerable by their circumstances.

Give us Sirach’s wisdom to set aside the pride that hides wrongdoing, Christ’s compassion that goes out to the wounded first, Paul’s vision of a love that always protects, and the Psalmist’s confidence that you, O Lord, redeem what is broken and crown the humble with kindness.

May this parish be a true sanctuary, safe for the smallest among us, attentive to the most vulnerable, honest with the truth, and faithful to the God whose love always protects.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Homily Guide for Safeguarding Sunday

“Love Protects” — 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 13 September 2026

A ten-minute homily draft to frame Safeguarding in a theological sense.

Readings: Sirach 27:30–28:7 · Psalm 103 · Romans 14:7-9 · Matthew 18:21-35

Guidance notes.

- If there is a recent or ongoing safeguarding case in your parish or diocese, consult your diocesan safeguarding office and, where relevant, communications team before preparing your homily or adapting this homily without sharing details of any case from the pulpit.
- Be mindful, survivors may be present. Avoid language that implies forgiveness is owed or overdue. The tone throughout should be steady and pastoral, not alarmed or accusatory toward the congregation.
- This homily deliberately does not use the parable to instruct victims to forgive. If adapting the text, please preserve that distinction — it is the most theologically and pastorally important element of this draft.
- Keep practical information brief and separate (e.g., a line about the parish safeguarding officer or diocesan helpline) rather than adding policy detail into the homily.
- Trim the “**reading the readings rightly**” section only with care, as it carries the theological safeguard against misreading the Gospel.

DRAFT HOMILY

Today’s Gospel gives us one of the hardest teachings in all of Scripture. Peter asks Jesus a very reasonable question: “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?” Peter is being generous — the rabbis of his day taught that forgiving someone three times was enough. Peter doubles that and adds one for good measure.

Jesus' answer stops the conversation cold: "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In other words: don't count. That's not the kind of number you tally on your fingers. It's the kind of number that tells you the counting itself is the wrong instinct.

Today our parish also marks Safeguarding Sunday, which our Church celebrates each year at the end of National Child Protection Week. This year the theme "Love Protects," is drawn from Saint Paul's words to the Corinthians: love is patient, love is kind, love does not seek its own interest, love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things — love always protects.

That word, **protects**, is not an afterthought in Paul's list. It sits right alongside patience and kindness as one of the things love simply *does*. And it is worth saying plainly, in this church, on this day, a parish that truly loves its children, its young people, and its most vulnerable members is a parish that actively protects them — not by good intentions alone, but by vigilance, by training, by listening, and by refusing to look away.

Reading the readings rightly

We need to be very careful, because it would be easy, and wrong, to take today's readings and turn them into a demand that anyone who has been hurt must simply forgive and move on.

Sirach warns us against nursing wrath and grudges. The Psalm tells us the Lord is "slow to anger and rich in compassion." And the Gospel gives us that servant who was forgiven an enormous debt by his master, only to go out and choke a fellow servant over a few dollars, and gets condemned for his hard-heartedness.

Read carelessly, that parable can sound like: *whatever was done to you, you must forgive it, and forgive it now, or God will be angry with you too.*

That's not what this Gospel is for, and it is certainly not something I want anyone in this church to hear as their instruction for today.

Look again at who forgives whom in the parable. It is the **master**- the one with all the power, the one who is owed the debt, who chooses mercy.

Jesus is not telling the servant who was choked that he must forgive his fellow servant on the spot. He is telling all of us something about God: - that God's mercy toward **us** is beyond

anything we could ever earn or deserve, and that mercy received should soften us, not that harm suffered must be waved away.

Forgiveness, in the Christian tradition, is never a demand we place on someone who has been wronged, still less on a child or a survivor of abuse. It is not amnesia, it is not silence, and it is not skipping past truth and justice to get to a tidy ending.

Real forgiveness, if, and when, it ever comes, is something offered freely, in a person's own time, often over years, and it can exist quite happily alongside full accountability, criminal justice, and permanent consequences for whoever caused the harm.

Sirach himself says: "remember the commandments, hate not your neighbor"; but two verses earlier he's also telling us that the vengeful *will* answer to the Lord for their sins, "for he remembers their sins in detail."

God does not forget wrongdoing. God's mercy does not mean wrongdoing didn't matter.

So, on Safeguarding Sunday, let's hear this Gospel - not as a call for victims to forgive- but as a call for *all of us*: our whole parish community, to imitate the master's character:: patient, slow to anger, quick to have compassion on the one who is suffering.

That is the love Paul describes. That is a love that protects.

What does "love protects" look like on a Tuesday afternoon in this parish, not just in a homily at Sunday Mass?

It looks like every single adult who works with our children and young people being safely recruited, trained, and supervised : not because we assume the worst of anyone, but precisely because **love does not leave safety to chance.**

It looks like taking seriously the older parishioner who hasn't been seen at Mass in a few weeks: , the person living alone, the parishioner with a disability who needs more than a ramp to truly belong here, the person struggling with their mental health who may be more vulnerable than they let on.

Safeguarding is not only about children. It is about every person in our care whose voice might be harder to hear or easier to dismiss.

It looks like taking a child seriously when they say something doesn't feel right - even, and especially when it's uncomfortable, even when it involves someone we respect. Psalm 103 tells us that God "redeems your life from destruction." That is our calling too: not to protect the reputation of an institution, but to redeem and protect the person in front of us.

And it looks like knowing that this parish has clear ways to raise a concern, and that whoever raises it will be listened to, not managed, minimized, or made to feel disloyal. A community that lives out "love protects" is a community where speaking up is treated as an act of love, not betrayal.

[If appropriate for your parish, briefly and simply name your Parish Safeguarding Representative/Officer by name and how to contact them.

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Closing

Saint Paul says love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Notice: he doesn't say love ignores all things, or excuses all things, or forgets all things.

Love that protects is not a soft love. It is a love with its eyes open.

This week, we're asked to be a community shaped less by the servant who forgot mercy the moment it cost him something, and more by the master who saw suffering and moved first:

the God who is "slow to anger and rich in compassion," who redeems what is broken.

May this parish be exactly that kind of community: one where every child, every young person, every elderly or isolated or vulnerable member among us knows in their bones that this is a safe place because here, love protects.

Amen.