

Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas, the Apostle, Melbourne



Prot. No. MPL: 119/25/10

8 September 2025

Circular – Safeguarding Sunday

Dear priests, brothers, sisters, and beloved children in Christ,

The Catholic Church in Australia observes Safeguarding Sunday on the second Sunday of September each year. This year, it falls on Sunday, September 14th, coinciding with the conclusion of National Child Protection Week. This day holds deep importance in our church life—not only in its social dimension but also in its spiritual meaning and significance.

Safeguarding Sunday is an opportunity to remember the grave abuses and failures committed in the past against children and vulnerable adults by those who are in church leadership and ministry. It is a time to pray for the victims and their families, to commit ourselves to justice, and to learn from these failures so that we may rise to new life.

We cannot undo the past. But as members of the Church, we share a solemn responsibility to ensure that such evils are never repeated. Every parishioner has a role in making sure our churches, premises, gatherings, and ministries are places of safety, dignity, and respect.

Let me remind you of a few points on this Safeguarding Sunday:

- Safeguarding is not the duty of a few but the shared responsibility of all clergy and faithful. Together, we must build a transparent, safe, and welcoming environment, especially for children and vulnerable adults.
- Providing safety and protection is not just a rule to follow—it is a core part of our Christian mission and a living witness to Jesus' command: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:35).
- From the beginning of our eparchy, safeguarding has been a vital ministry, carried out in accordance with both Church and state law. This commitment is not merely compliance with regulations but an expression of Christian love.

Awareness and training are essential in fulfilling this responsibility. Safeguarding training equips us with knowledge and vigilance, enabling us to create truly safe environments. I am grateful that more than 15,000 people in our eparchy have already completed this training—a remarkable achievement. I sincerely thank you for your commitment and pray for the fruitfulness of your efforts.

However, safeguarding training is not a one-time obligation. All volunteers are required to undertake training every three years. By law, no one may serve in any voluntary capacity without completing both the training and the Working with Children requirements. If you have not yet done so, please make it a priority.

Training should not be seen as a burden but as an opportunity for personal growth—helping us serve with greater safety, responsibility, and compassion. Parish Priests and Parish Safety Officers are reminded to ensure regular training sessions across all parishes and missions.

Sadly, in some places, violations of safe environment practices and the Zero Alcohol Policy have led to complaints in civil courts and eparchial safeguarding office. Please be reminded that in such cases, both Civil Law and Canon Law will apply, and those involved will bear full responsibility under the law. Such actions not only cause harm but also bring unnecessary burdens on community and the younger generation. Let us instead live out the merciful love of Christ in all that we do.

Let us also remember that the gospel many people read is not written in books but revealed in our words and actions. I extend heartfelt thanks to all who work tirelessly for safeguarding in our eparchy—especially our Safeguarding Officers in parishes and missions—for their quiet yet invaluable service.

Safeguarding is not just about rules or policies but about honoring human dignity, treating every person with love and respect, and embodying the values of the gospel. My prayer is that in every place and activity of our eparchy, all—especially children and the elderly—may live without fear or anxiety. May the observance of Safeguarding Sunday strengthen our resolve to make this a reality.

Finally, I entrust all our safeguarding efforts to the maternal protection of our heavenly Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

With prayers and blessings,

Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI