Plymouth Unitarian Church ‘Safeguarding Sunday Service’ Novmber 22nd 2026

‘Love Protects’

Opening Music:’Ubi Caritus’ by Voces8 3 Minutes 56 secs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-50CeNelnA&list=RDB-50CeNelnA&start_radio=1

Chalice Lighting: ‘The Way’ by Rev Cliff Reed

We light this chalice
to bring light to our minds,
wisdom to our souls, and
warmth to our hearts:
light to show us the Way,
wisdom to walk it truly,
warmth to enfold our fellow
pilgrims with compassion.

Welcome and Opening words:

”Good morning, welcome to each and every one of you, whoever you are and however you are feeling, and whatever you bring in your heart – joy, sadness, uncertainty or curiosity! You are welcome, whatever your faith or none.

You are especially welcome if you are joining us for the first time, whether you are here in church, joining us via the wonders of technology on Zoom, or watching the recording online later.”

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This Service for SafeGuarding Sunday 2026 has been prepared by Lisa Anthony and me, Sheila Evans. We are on on the church SG team, and we’ll say more about that during the Service. The theme for SG Sunday this year is ‘Love Protects’, reflected in our hymns, prayers, stories and readings. We hope you will find it helpful and encouraging.

Some opening words, by Rev Anne Barker, American UU Minister

We gather with a hunger for reconciliation.

What is done cannot be undone.
What is done next must now be done with care.

We gather because we are hopeful,
Because we have visions and dreams of a brighter future.

That there may be more than vision in this room,
These are the wounds we must heal together—
Grief and anger for all that has been lost,
Guilt or fear in the reliving,
Pain that has gone without sufficient comfort,
Mistrust that was earned, that continues burning still,

Every injury we may have named, and yet still carry,
Those we haven’t, can’t, or dare not speak aloud,
Those we are not ready to make public,
Those still not recognized, accepted, understood.

These are the wounds that seek replacement—
Not cancellation or denial,
Wounds we will tend cautiously,

Applying the salve of understanding,
Forming scars that mark our history,
Without disfiguring the future we might share.

This is not a time of quick solutions, fancy talking.
This is a slow precision. This is a prayer for peace.

We are new at this endeavor. New at listening, new at hearing.
New at taking enough time to honestly receive one another's stories.

What is done cannot be undone.
What is done next must now be done with care.

We gather because we are hopeful,
Because we have visions and dreams of a brighter future.

May the strength of this time together help us to walk forward.
May the wisdom of this experience help us to know our path.
May we have the courage to return, as often as necessary, until our way is clear.
May we have the perseverance, together, to see it through.

May we cause it to be so.

1st Hymn: Green 180 'This Old World'

Prayers:
1.. Adapted from words by Rev June Pettitt

Spirit of Life and Love,
As we come together on this day, each with our own joys and our own sorrows,
May we be thankful for all the blessings we enjoy.
May we never cease to wonder at the joy and beauty which can be found in our world.
Yet, even as we wonder, we know that for many, life can be spoiled by greed, hatred, unkindess, and cruelty.
May we always join those who work for a better world,
And may we find life's meaning in so doing.
We pray that one day, the dream of a kind, just and caring world for everyone will become a reality.

2.A Prayer for Safeguarding Sunday (adapted from that in the 31:8 worship resources pack)
God of unconditional and encompassing love
Who shows us how to love others,
forgive us for the times we've looked away,
or stayed silent when we should have spoken up.
Teach us to love as you love.

Spirit of compassion, who sees the overlooked,
and draws near the hurting and exploited,
help us to see with your eyes, listen with your ears,
and give us courage to stand with those who are not heard.
Teach us to love as you love.

Spirit of truth, who shines light into darkness
who reveals what is hidden and unspoken,
free us from our shame, our denial, and fear,
lead us in the way of honesty, openness and healing.
Teach us to love as you love.

As we are protected by divine love, finding a place of safety and refuge,
may our Church be a place where:
power is used to serve,
people find belonging,
and love is made real in what we say and do.
Teach us to love as you love,
with love that protects, always. *Amen.*

Story
As has become a tradition started by Rev Kate, we include a story in case there are any children in the congregation. But the grown ups seem to enjoy them too! And today we have 2 stories for you. The first one is the story of The Elephants, and will be followed by a short video showing how elephants love and protect their young.

Story: Elephant Safeguarding

When the earth begins to tremble, or when danger stalks the plains, elephants do not scatter. Instead, they move with a quiet, ancient choreography known as the alert circle.

At the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, when a 5.2-magnitude earthquake shook the region, adult African elephants—including Ndlula, Umngani, and Khosi—did not wait to see what was happening. Sensing the low-frequency seismic vibrations through the soles of their feet long before human senses could register the shift, they reacted instantly.

They converged from across the enclosure, pulling together in a tight, unyielding cluster. In the center, safely tucked away from the unknown, stood the youngest members of the family: seven-year-old calves Mkhaya and Zuli.

Around them, the adults formed a living fortress. They stood facing outward with their massive ears flared wide to catch every sound and breeze, turning their thick shoulders and tusks toward any imaginary horizon the threat might come from. Zuli is still a baby and is coddled as such, but his role will change over the next few years as he becomes a bull and moves to join a bachelor group while the female elephants stay with the family unit for their entire lives.. When young Zuli nervously edged toward the perimeter of the circle, the older female Khosi gently reached out with her trunk, softly tapping him on the head and face—a tender, grounding reassurance that said, 'You are safe here. Stay in the circle'.

"For three tense minutes, the herd held their ground like a single, breathing organism. When the tremors faded and the air grew still, the adults slowly relaxed their posture, the circle softened, and the family returned to their day. It was a simple, profound reminder that in a world of sudden quakes, the greatest shelter is one another.

Video of the incident

1st Reading: 1 Corinthians verses 1 - 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

2nd Hymn: Green 174 'A Church is a Living Fellowship'

2nd Story: The Legend of the two brothers

The holiest site in Judaism is Mount Moriah, Har Habayit, the Temple Mount.

This story relates that long ago, before the first temple was built, two brothers lived and farmed on that site.

One was married and had a large family, while the other was single.

They lived in close proximity to each other, and each worked his land growing wheat. When harvest time arrived, each was blessed with a bountiful crop and piled up his grain for long-term storage.

The unmarried brother, observing his good fortune, thought to himself that God had blessed him with more than he needed, whereas his brother, who was blessed with a large family, could surely use more. He arose in the middle of the night and secretly took from his grain and put it in his brother's pile.

Similarly, the married brother thought to himself that he was fortunate to have children who will care for him in his old age, while his brother will depend on what he saved. He, too, arose in the middle of the night and quietly transferred grain from his pile to his brother's.
In the morning, each pondered why there was no noticeable decrease in his own pile, and so they repeated the transfer the next night. These nocturnal activities went on for several nights, until one night the brothers bumped into each other. In that instant, in the dark of night, the glow of brotherly love lit up the mountain sky; they each understood what the other had been doing and fell into each other's arms in a loving embrace.

According to the legend, when God saw that display of brotherly love, He selected the site for His Temple.

Meditative reading: on Loving Kindness by Yvonne Aburrow

Focus on your breathing, just noticing the soft rising and falling of your belly, or the breath as it comes in at your nostrils.

Now be aware of yourself, and cultivate loving kindness towards yourself [pause].

Now extend loving kindness to someone you love [pause].

Now extend loving kindness to your particular group of friends [pause].

Now extend loving kindness to someone you have difficulty getting on with [pause].

Now extend loving kindness to the community you are part of here in the chapel [pause].
Now extend loving kindness to the whole world [pause].
Now bring it back to yourself and cultivate loving kindness towards yourself.

Now just breathe gently and normally, and run through the cycle of loving kindness again: self – beloved – friends – foe – community – the world [long pause].

Invitation to write questions, thoughts, suggestions on the papers

On your chair, you have a piece of paper. This is for you to write any questions, about Safeguarding, our SG policy, or any concern about something which is worrying you, and which you'd like to speak about with one of our Safeguarding people. You may write anonymously, or if you wish to add your name, this will be seen only by our Safe guarders and treated in confidence. You can put it into the box next to the offertory bucket. .

Reflective Music: 'I'll be there' by Mariah Carey and Wayna Morris
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-5tKLMDLcE&list=RDR-5tKLMDLcE&start_radio=1

ADDRESS - LOVE PROTECTS

As you know, we have a service every year to take some time to think and reflect on what safeguarding means for us in this Church and community.

On first thoughts it may seem that this isn't a very spiritually focused topic but as we heard in the reading from 1 Corinthians, living from a place of Love means that we have a responsibility to Protect others who, for whatever reasons, may be vulnerable and need our help.

When we love someone, protecting them isn't a duty — it's instinctive. The most natural thing in the world. Think about a loving parent with their child, or how you would naturally shield a friend or relative from harm. You don't need a policy to tell you to keep them safe. You just do it, because that's what love does.

Love actively:

•shows patience

•extends kindness

•speaks truth

•trusts, hopes, and perseveres

And of course, Love protects. Always.

To Safeguard others is a clear example of loving protection. It is one of the most practical ways we can serve our Church community. Love is a choice and an action. It is doing whatever is needed to keep one another safe.

Safeguarding is Love in Action.

Our church community is open to everyone. Church is much more than these Sunday services. It is the Wednesday morning café, the poetry group, the events, the people who hire our space. All

of these and more make the community of this Church. And in this community, anyone can be vulnerable and need our support.

We all have times when we feel vulnerable and hurt, when we might need help and protection from others. We all know that we have a responsibility to protect and safeguard Children and Young People but adults can be vulnerable too. The marginalised, the homeless, people struggling with mental health difficulties, older adults, people who are lonely, those who are sick or have disabilities. Any of us could be in a position where we need someone to help or protect us and so Safeguarding can take many forms. It may be something simple like checking in with someone who lives alone and who we haven't seen for a while.

Or challenging unkind or bullying behaviour if we see it happening.

Sometimes Safeguarding is boring, following processes that keep people safe, even when they feel inconvenient and /or time consuming.

Sometimes it is hard, Safeguarding could involve speaking up when something doesn't seem right, and that can take courage.

None of this feels particularly 'spiritual' in the moment of it happening but Safeguarding isn't a 'task', it's an expression of spiritual life, because it is an act of love.

As the legend of the 2 brothers tells us, sometimes it is right to make sacrifices, to prioritise the needs of others. This may be inconvenient or difficult at times. It may ,mean that we have less for ourselves. But this story invites us to trust that when we live those principles of Love in Action we will all find that we have enough, we will all be safe and this will bring us all closer together.

The 'Alert Circle' described in the Elephant's story shows the instinctive commitment to take care of each other when threatened and to look after the vulnerable, placing them inside our circle of protection. At different times we might be on either the inside or the outside of the circle but as a community, when we come together through Love in Action, we are always stronger together.

So what does this mean for us here?

It means that if you are feeling vulnerable or unsafe yourself, or if you are worried about someone else who you think might be vulnerable, then you can talk to someone here. Our Safeguarding representatives here at the Church are Sheila and Lisa and the Committee member with a focus on Safeguarding is Nick who attends services on Zoom. We will soon have a new Safeguarding noticeboard up in the corridor by the kitchen. The board will give information about who can help and how to contact us as well as more information about how Safeguarding works in this Church. Once the display is up, please take some time to have a look familiarise yourself with everything there.

If you do have a concern and want to talk with one of us please be assured that anything you share will be treated respectfully, sensitively and in confidence. We can't promise 100% confidentiality, there might be times when we need to share information to keep someone safe or involve other services in supporting someone, but beyond that we will never share information beyond the Safeguarding Team.

Sometimes someone may not be aware that they are in a situation that is unsafe or which makes them vulnerable. So we can all make a commitment to looking and listening out for each other. If you have a concern about another person but are not sure if this if a safeguarding issue or not, please feel free to talk it over with one of the Safeguarding team and we can explore together whether there is any action needed.

For our part, the Safeguarding Team attend regular training and meetings to keep up to date with our responsibilities. We will continue to update you when anything changes to have this annual service. We also welcome any of your thoughts or suggestions and are happy to talk more about this if you have any questions.

This Safeguarding Service isn't about adding another burden to your already busy schedule. Instead, it's an invitation to see protection not as an obligation, but as an opportunity. So let's embrace protection not as a duty, but as one of the most beautiful expressions of our Love for each other, Love in Action.

Final Hymn: Green 188 'Let Love continue long'

Closing words: by Lauralyn Bellamy

If here you have found freedom, take it with you into the world.
If you have found comfort, go and share it with others.
If you have dreamed dreams, help one another, that they may come true!
If here you have known love,
Give some back to a bruised and hurting world.
Go in peace.

Extinguish the chalice

Closing Music/video: 'With a little help from my friends'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrFdSqUCff8&list=RDnrFdSqUCff8&start_radio=1