

A close-up photograph of a small, brown, downy bird chick perched gently on the palm of a human hand. The bird has dark brown feathers on its back and wings, with lighter, downy feathers on its chest and belly. Its beak is small and dark. The hand is light-skinned and positioned with the palm facing upwards. The background is a solid black, which makes the bird and the hand stand out prominently.

Safeguarding As Franciscan Dicipleship

SESSION 2

A TRAINING WORKBOOK
THIRD ORDER SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS

INTRODUCTION SESSION 2

Safeguarding is not only about care; it is also about justice. To safeguard well is to honour the dignity of every person, to speak truthfully, and to act with integrity—even when doing so carries a cost. In this session, we are invited to reflect more deeply on safeguarding as a matter of justice, witness, and responsible governance. This calls us to ask honest and sometimes difficult questions about power, influence, and accountability within our shared life.

The prophet's words offer a clear guide: to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Justice is not an abstract idea. It is expressed in the choices we make, the voices we attend to, and the systems we build. For Franciscans, this is grounded in a commitment to humility and minority. Saint Francis chose not status or privilege, but solidarity with those who lacked power. He lived transparently and acted truthfully before God and others.

Seen in this light, safeguarding becomes justice in action, truth made accountable, and love embodied through responsible structures. It calls us to ensure that all voices are heard—especially those easily overlooked—to recognise how power can distort judgment, and to respond with courage and clarity when concerns arise. It also asks us to create patterns of governance that are transparent, consistent, and trustworthy.

It may challenge our assumptions and require us to let go of reputation or control. Yet it is deeply rooted in the Gospel. We are invited to seek the grace to love truth more than comfort, to pursue justice with humility, and to walk together in the light.

This work is not always comfortable. It may ask us to let go of reputation, certainty, or control. But it is Gospel work.

SESSION TWO

JUSTICE, WITNESS, AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

DAILY PRINCIPLES DAYS 5–12

OPENING SCRIPTURE

MICAH 6:8

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?”

Pause in silence.

ICEBREAKER

Invite participants to reflect in small groups:
“When have you seen someone speak up for justice even when it was unpopular?”
What made that courage possible?

READING FROM THE PRINCIPLES BOOK

Invite someone to read Day Seven
– The Second Aim from the Safeguarding Culture and the Daily Principles reflections.
Allow a short silence afterwards.

WONDERING

Whose voice is hardest for us to hear
— and why?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

TEACHING REFLECTION

Safeguarding is justice in action.

GENESIS 1:27

reminds us that every person bears the image of God.

PROVERBS 31:8,9

calls us to speak for those who cannot speak.

JOHN 8:32

reminds us that truth brings freedom.

Safeguarding must never be shaped by status, influence, or comfort.

FRANCISCAN STORY

Francis Before the Bishop

Francis renounced wealth and privilege publicly.

REFLECTION:

What did Francis lose in that moment?
What might we fear losing when acting
decisively in safeguarding matters?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

SECULAR ILLUSTRATION

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Atticus Finch defends Tom Robinson
despite hostility.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

REFLECTION:

Why was Tom Robinson not believed?
How does status distort justice?
Whose voice might struggle to be believed
among us?

GROUP REFLECTION

Are we more protective of leaders
than vulnerable members?
Does influence affect whose
concerns are believed?
Where might attachment
to reputation hinder transparency?
Do we think long-term about
safeguarding decisions?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

GOVERNANCE APPLICATION

Discuss together:

Are reporting pathways clear?

Is confidentiality understood and practised
responsibly?

Are safeguarding agreements reviewed
regularly?

Are we thinking far enough ahead about risk?
Identify one improvement your group could
make.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of justice and mercy,
you hear the cry of the poor
and you do not turn away.
You break down walls of hostility
and expose the pride
that keeps them standing.
You lift up those pushed aside
and unmask the prejudice
that hides in holy language.
Open our ears to the voices we resist.
Disturb our comfort
where it rests on inequality.
Free us from loyalties
that silence the vulnerable.
Make our love more than sentiment —
make it solidarity.
Make our harmony more than quiet —
make it justice.
Spirit of liberation,
reshape our community
so that those on the margins
stand at the centre of our concern.

LEADER NOTES

LEADER NOTES – MICAH 6:8

Micah was a prophet speaking into a time when religious practice continued, but justice and compassion were often neglected. In the surrounding verses, the prophet imagines people asking what God really wants — more sacrifices, larger offerings, greater displays of religious devotion. Micah's response is simple and direct: God's desire is not ritual performance but transformed living.

The verse names three foundations of faithful life. To do justice means actively seeking fairness and protection for those who are vulnerable or marginalised. To love mercy calls for compassion, patience, and kindness in how we treat others. To walk humbly with God reminds us that none of us stands above accountability; we live in dependence on God's guidance.

In the context of safeguarding, this verse provides a helpful framework. Safeguarding is an expression of justice because it protects those at risk of harm. It reflects mercy through careful listening and compassionate response to those who have been hurt. It requires humility because communities must acknowledge that power can be misused and that clear structures and accountability are necessary.

Leaders may wish to emphasise that Micah's words move faith from abstract belief into practical action. Safeguarding culture grows when justice, mercy, and humility shape how decisions are made and how power is exercised within the community.

BRIEF TEACHING NOTES

These scriptures together remind us that safeguarding is deeply rooted in the biblical vision of justice and human dignity.

GENESIS 1:27

The image of God

This verse teaches that every human being is created in the image of God. Because of this, every person carries inherent dignity and worth. Safeguarding begins with this conviction: harm to another person is not only a social wrong but a violation of the dignity God has given them.

PROVERBS 31:8–9

Speaking for the vulnerable

The wisdom tradition calls God's people to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." This passage highlights a responsibility to advocate for those whose voices may be ignored or dismissed.

Safeguarding therefore includes creating environments where concerns can be raised safely and where vulnerable people are taken seriously.

JOHN 8:32

Truth brings freedom

Jesus teaches that truth has a liberating power. In safeguarding contexts, truth-telling is essential. Naming harm honestly, listening carefully to concerns, and resisting denial or minimisation are part of creating communities where healing and freedom become possible.

Together these passages remind us that safeguarding must never be shaped by status, influence, or comfort. Instead it must be shaped by the biblical call to honour human dignity, protect the vulnerable, and pursue truth with courage and humility.

FRANCIS BEFORE THE BISHOP

As Francis grew deeper in his desire to follow Christ, his life began to change dramatically. He gave away money to the poor, spent long hours in prayer, and spoke openly about his desire to live the Gospel in simplicity. His father, Pietro di Bernardone, a wealthy cloth merchant of Assisi, became increasingly distressed by Francis' behaviour. When Francis sold some cloth and a horse to repair the ruined church of San Damiano, his father was furious and demanded that the money be returned.

The conflict became so intense that Pietro brought Francis before the Bishop of Assisi, Guido, asking that the Church intervene and require Francis to return both the money and his inheritance.

Standing before the bishop and the people of Assisi, Francis quietly handed back the money he had taken. Then, in a gesture that shocked those present, he removed the fine clothes he

was wearing — clothes that belonged to his father — and laid them down. Standing there in his undergarment, he said that from that moment on he would no longer call Pietro his father, but would say instead, "Our Father who art in heaven."

The bishop, moved by Francis' sincerity, wrapped his cloak around him to cover him and protect him.

In this moment Francis publicly renounced wealth, status, and family privilege. He stepped away from the security of inheritance and entrusted himself completely to God.

For Franciscan tradition, this event marks one of the decisive moments in Francis' conversion. He chose a life shaped not by power, influence, or possession, but by humility, freedom, and trust in God.

THE STORY THROUGH THE EYES OF THE BISHOP

Bishop Guido had seen disputes before. Families argued over money and inheritance often enough, and the Church was frequently asked to mediate. When Pietro di Bernardone brought his complaint against his son Francis, the bishop likely expected a difficult but ordinary family disagreement.

Yet what unfolded was anything but ordinary.

The young man standing before him did not argue or defend himself. Instead, Francis returned the money quietly. Then, in an act that must have stunned everyone present, he removed the clothes he had received from his father and placed them on the ground.

Francis' words were simple and clear: he would now belong entirely to God.

For Bishop Guido, this moment revealed not rebellion but sincerity. The bishop saw that Francis' gesture was not an act of defiance but an expression of radical commitment to the Gospel. In response, he stepped forward, covered Francis with his cloak, and received him under the care of the Church.

From the bishop's perspective, the scene may have felt both unsettling and deeply moving. A young man had publicly stepped away from privilege and protection in order to follow Christ more freely. The bishop's act of covering Francis symbolised both pastoral care and the Church's recognition of the authenticity of his calling.

In Franciscan memory, this moment reveals a turning point: a movement away from status and possession toward humility, trust, and freedom in God.

FRANCIS BEFORE THE BISHOP;

A MONOLOGUE FROM BISHOP GUIDO (IMAGINARY)

I had been asked to settle many disputes in Assisi, but that morning felt different even before the young man arrived.

Pietro di Bernardone stood before me, angry and wounded. He was a respected merchant, a man whose success was known throughout the town. His complaint was straightforward enough: his son Francis had taken cloth and money and given it away. He demanded justice. He demanded the return of what was his.

Then Francis stepped forward.

I had seen the boy before in the streets of Assisi — once a carefree young man, fond of celebration and laughter. But the person standing before me now seemed changed. There was a calmness about him, a strange freedom that I could not easily explain.

He did not argue with his father.
He did not defend himself.
Quietly, he placed the money on the ground before us.
And then something happened that I will never forget.

Before the gathered crowd — townspeople, merchants, neighbours — Francis began to remove the clothes he was wearing. The fine garments of a merchant's son. The marks of privilege and inheritance.

One by one he laid them down.
The square fell silent.

Standing there, stripped of everything his father had given him, Francis spoke with remarkable clarity.

"From now on," he said, "I will no longer say 'my father Pietro di Bernardone,' but 'Our Father who art in heaven.'"

In that moment I understood that this was no ordinary rebellion of a son against his father. This was something deeper. Something costly.

He was renouncing not only wealth but the protection that wealth brings. Status. Security. The expectations of family and society.

The young man before me had chosen another path.

I stepped forward almost without thinking and placed my cloak around his shoulders. Not only to cover his nakedness, but to shelter him. To acknowledge that the Church must now care for the one who had entrusted himself so completely to God.

As I looked at him, I realised that I was witnessing the beginning of something I did not yet fully understand.

A young man had just laid down power, privilege, and inheritance in the public square.

And somehow, in that moment of apparent loss, he seemed more free than any of us.

LEADER HANDOUT - SECULAR ILLUSTRATION

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

To Kill a Mockingbird is a well-known novel by Harper Lee, set in the American South during a time of deep racial prejudice.

In the story, a lawyer named Atticus Finch is asked to defend Tom Robinson, a black man who has been accused of a crime he did not commit. Despite strong evidence of Tom's innocence, many people in the town assume he must be guilty because of prejudice and social pressure.

Atticus knows that defending Tom will bring criticism and hostility. Even so, he chooses to stand for justice and truth. He speaks calmly and courageously in court, challenging the assumptions and unfair treatment that Tom faces.

The story highlights how social influence, reputation, and prejudice can affect whose voice is believed and whose suffering is ignored.

SAFEGUARDING REFLECTION

This story can help us reflect on safeguarding within communities. Sometimes people who raise concerns may not be easily believed, particularly if those they question are respected or influential. Safeguarding requires a willingness to listen carefully, examine evidence honestly, and ensure that justice is not shaped by status or popularity.

WONDERINGS FOR DISCUSSION

I wonder whose voice might be hardest to hear in our own communities.

I wonder whether influence or reputation ever affects whose concerns are taken seriously.

I wonder what courage looks like when protecting someone vulnerable becomes unpopular.

ARE REPORTING PATHWAYS CLEAR?

Everyone in the community should know what to do if they become aware of a safeguarding concern. Reporting pathways should be simple, visible, and easy to understand. This normally means knowing who the safeguarding lead is, how to contact them, and when concerns must be referred beyond the local community to diocesan or statutory safeguarding authorities. When reporting routes are unclear, people may hesitate or try to manage concerns informally, which can increase risk and delay appropriate action.

LEADER BACKGROUND NOTES

GOVERNANCE APPLICATION

These questions help the group reflect on how safeguarding works in the practical life of the community. Safeguarding culture grows not only from good intentions but from clear structures, shared understanding, and consistent practice.

IS CONFIDENTIALITY UNDERSTOOD AND PRACTISED RESPONSIBLY?

Confidentiality is essential for protecting those who raise concerns and those who may be affected by safeguarding situations. However, confidentiality does not mean secrecy or silence. Responsible confidentiality means handling information carefully and sharing it only with those who need to know in order to ensure safety and appropriate response. Leaders should help communities understand that responsible information sharing is part of safeguarding and is necessary for protection and accountability.

ARE SAFEGUARDING AGREEMENTS REVIEWED REGULARLY?

Where safeguarding agreements or clear behavioural boundaries are in place, particularly in situations involving known risk, these should be documented and reviewed regularly. Regular review helps ensure that everyone involved understands the expectations and responsibilities. It also allows the community to consider whether the safeguards remain appropriate and effective as circumstances change.

ARE WE THINKING FAR ENOUGH AHEAD ABOUT RISK?

Safeguarding requires long-term thinking. Decisions should not focus only on immediate circumstances but should also consider future implications. Communities need to ask questions such as: who might be affected by this decision in the future? What safeguards may still be needed in months or years to come? Who will monitor them? Thinking ahead helps prevent situations where risks slowly re-emerge because vigilance fades over time.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS: