



Safeguarding As Franciscan Discipleship

SESSION 1

A TRAINING WORKBOOK
THIRD ORDER SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS

INTRODUCTION SESSION 1

Safeguarding is not an administrative burden added to our life as Franciscans.

It is part of how we live the Gospel.

In the Rule of 1221, Saint Francis writes:

“All the brothers without exception are forbidden to wield power or authority... whoever wishes to become great shall be their servant.”

Safeguarding is servanthood made structural, humility made accountable, and love made real.

THIS WORKBOOK IS DESIGNED FOR USE IN:

- Area Days and TSSF small groups
- Formation gatherings
- Postulant and Novice training
- Chapter reflection

It may be used as three 90-minute sessions or as part of a day event.

Each session invites us to reflect prayerfully on safeguarding through Scripture, Franciscan tradition, and the Safeguarding Culture and the Daily Principles reflections.

SESSION ONE

CONVERSION, POWER, AND BOUNDARIES

DAILY PRINCIPLES DAYS 1-4

ICEBREAKER

Invite participants to share briefly in pairs:
"Think of a time when someone's attentiveness made you feel safe or respected."

After a few minutes ask the group:
What made that moment possible?
What attitudes or behaviours created safety?

OPENING SCRIPTURE

Philippians 2:5-8

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant."

Pause in silence.

READING FROM THE PRINCIPLES BOOK

Invite someone to read Day One – The Object from the Safeguarding Culture and the Daily Principles reflections.

Allow a short silence afterwards.

WONDERING

What might need to "fall into the earth" in our community so that safety and trust can grow?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

TEACHING REFLECTION

Francis' conversion began when he turned toward the leper rather than away from him. Safeguarding begins in the same place — the refusal to look away from vulnerability.

Scripture reminds us:

EXODUS 3 : 5

"Remove the sandals from your feet."

MATTHEW 18 : 6

Protect the little ones.

1 PETER 5 : 2-3

Leaders must not dominate.

Power must be surrendered, structured, and accountable.

Safeguarding is part of that surrender.

FRANCISCAN STORY

Francis and the Leper

Francis wrote in his Testament that what once seemed bitter became sweetness when he embraced the leper. His conversion began with attentiveness.

He did not dominate.

He did not control.

He drew near with reverence.

REFLECTION:

What did Francis have to let go of in order to approach the leper?

Where are we tempted to look away rather than draw near with reverence?

GROUP WONDERINGS

Choose one or two of these

- I wonder where we see clinging to reputation in church contexts.
- I wonder how vowed discipline strengthens safeguarding.
- I wonder what chastity looks like in everyday relationships.
- I wonder how we ensure boundaries are clear but compassionate.
- I wonder what happens in us when someone raises a concern.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

SECULAR ILLUSTRATION

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Power is like the Ring.

Even good people believe they can manage it.
But unless it is surrendered and limited, it corrupts.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Identify one area in your context where boundaries could be strengthened.
Write down one practical step you and your group could take.

REFLECTION:

Where do we assume we are strong enough to “handle” power without safeguards?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

CLOSING PRAYER

God of self-giving love,
you show us that fruit comes through
surrender
and life grows through trust.
Where we cling to reputation,
loosen our grip.
Where we cling to control,
teach us release.
Where we cling to comfort,
give us courage.
Plant within us a deeper love
that chooses protection over pride
and truth over self-preservation.
May what needs to fall
fall gently into your keeping,
so that trust, safety, and new life
may grow among us.

LEADER NOTES

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 AND SAFEGUARDING

This passage is one of the most profound descriptions in the New Testament of the character of Christ. Paul invites the Christian community to adopt the same mindset as Jesus — a pattern of humility, self-giving love, and servant-hearted leadership. Christ does not cling to power or status. Instead, he empties himself and takes the form of a servant.

For safeguarding reflection, this passage speaks directly to how power is held within Christian communities. Safeguarding culture begins with recognising that leadership in the Church is not about status, control, or influence. It is about service. When Paul says “let the same mind be in you,” he is calling the whole community to adopt Christ’s pattern of humility and accountability.

Christ’s “self-emptying” (often described with the Greek word *kenosis*) is not weakness but a deliberate refusal to dominate. Safeguarding culture requires the same posture. It invites leaders and members alike to hold authority lightly, to remain accountable, and to ensure that power is always exercised for the protection and flourishing of others, especially those who are vulnerable.

This passage also reminds us that safeguarding is not only a matter for those in formal leadership roles. Paul addresses the whole community. A healthy safeguarding culture grows when everyone takes responsibility for creating an environment where dignity, safety, and respect are normal expectations.

Leaders may wish to invite participants to reflect on questions such as: How do we model servant leadership in practice?

What does “self-emptying” look like in positions of responsibility? How can humility help us listen more carefully when concerns are raised?

In safeguarding terms, Philippians 2 calls the Church to a culture where power is consciously limited, service is honoured, and the wellbeing of others takes priority over reputation or status.

BRIEF LEADER NOTES ON THE SCRIPTURES

EXODUS 3:5

“Remove the sandals from your feet.”

When Moses encounters the burning bush, God reminds him that he is standing on holy ground. Safeguarding invites us to recognise that every human life carries this same holiness. When we encounter vulnerability, we approach with reverence, care, and humility.

MATTHEW 18:6

“Protect the little ones.”

Jesus gives a stark warning about causing harm to the vulnerable. This passage reminds the Church that protecting those at risk is not optional. It is a serious responsibility rooted in the heart of the Gospel.

1 PETER 5:2-3

“Leaders must not dominate.”

Christian leadership is not about control or privilege. Leaders are called to shepherd with humility and example, not coercion. Safeguarding culture requires leadership that is accountable, transparent, and servant-hearted.

Together these passages remind us that safeguarding is about recognising the holiness of others, protecting the vulnerable, and ensuring that power in the Church is exercised with humility and responsibility.

FRANCIS AND THE LEPER :

Before his conversion, Francis of Assisi had a deep fear of lepers. Like many in medieval society, he instinctively avoided them. The sight of their suffering and isolation filled him with dread.

Yet as Francis began to seek God more deeply, something changed within him.

One day, while riding outside Assisi, he encountered a leper on the road. His first instinct was to turn away, as he always had. But this time Francis stopped. Remembering his desire to follow Christ more faithfully, he dismounted from his horse and approached the man.

Overcoming his fear, Francis gave the leper alms and then embraced him.

Later Francis would write in his Testament:

“What seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I delayed a little and left the world.”

For Francis, this moment became the beginning of his conversion. In the person everyone else avoided, he recognised the presence of Christ. What had once filled him with fear became a place of grace.

The encounter with the leper taught Francis that following Christ meant drawing near to those who were rejected, vulnerable, and forgotten.

His conversion began when he turned toward the one he had always feared.

THE LEPER SPEAKS

RETELLING THE STORY

They do not see me anymore.

Once I had a name, a family, a place in the market. I remember the sound of voices calling to one another, the warmth of hands that did not recoil. But disease has a way of erasing a person long before death comes. Now I am only the leper — a warning to others, a figure people avoid on the road.

I have learned the rhythm of rejection.
Feet quicken when I appear.
Eyes turn away.
Cloaks are pulled closer.
People pretend not to see.
It is easier that way.

I do not blame them entirely. Fear is a powerful teacher. Still, there is a loneliness deeper than the sickness itself — the loneliness of being treated as if you are already gone.

So when I saw him coming down the road that day, I expected the same. A young man, well dressed, walking quickly. I thought he would turn aside like all the others.

But he did not.
He slowed.

For a moment I felt the familiar panic. When someone comes too near, you expect anger, stones, shouting. I almost warned him away.

Instead he looked at me.
Not with disgust. Not with pity. But as if I were... a person.
No one had done that for a long time.

Then something stranger still happened. He stepped closer. Close enough that I could see the struggle in his face — the fear he was wrestling with, the instinct to recoil. I recognised it; I had seen it in countless others.

But this time the fear did not win.

He reached out.
When his hand touched me, the world changed.
Not because my body was healed — that came later.
But because, for the first time in years, someone had refused to look away.

In that moment I realised something: the deepest wound of my life had not been the disease. It had been the turning of faces, the quiet agreement that I no longer belonged.

And this man — Francis, they later called him — broke that agreement.

He did not cure my loneliness with words or charity. He simply drew near with reverence, as if the ground between us were holy.

Perhaps that is where healing always begins.
Not with power.
Not with control.
But with the courage to see the one everyone else avoids.

If you want to know where conversion begins, I can tell you.

It begins the moment someone refuses to look away.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

SECULAR ILLUSTRATION: THE LORD OF THE RINGS

BRIEF TELLING OF THE STORY

The Lord of the Rings is a well-known story by J.R.R. Tolkien about a powerful ring that gives great influence to whoever possesses it. At first glance, the Ring seems useful. Some characters believe they could use its power for good purposes — to defeat evil or protect others.

However, the Ring slowly corrupts anyone who tries to keep or control it. It feeds pride, ambition, and the desire to dominate. Even wise and good characters recognise that they are not immune to its influence. Because of this, they refuse to possess it and insist that the Ring must ultimately be destroyed rather than controlled.

SAFEGUARDING REFLECTION

This story provides a helpful way to think about power within communities. Most people who hold positions of trust begin with good intentions. Yet power — whether spiritual authority, leadership responsibility, influence, or trust — can subtly distort judgement if it is not consciously limited. Safeguarding acknowledges this human reality. It does not assume that individuals are immune to the effects of power. Instead, it encourages clear boundaries, shared accountability, and transparent structures so that authority is always exercised safely and responsibly.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Why do characters in the story believe they could manage the Ring safely?

What happens when power is held without limits or accountability?

How might this story help us reflect on power and responsibility in church life?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS: