



Safeguarding As Franciscan Discipleship

SESSION 3

A TRAINING WORKBOOK
THIRD ORDER SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS

INTRODUCTION SESSION 3

Safeguarding is not a task to be completed once and set aside; it is a way of living together. In this session, the focus moves beyond actions and policies to something deeper: the culture we are forming. The question is not only what we do, but who we are becoming as a community.

We are called to speak the truth in love. This is not simple. Truth without love can wound, while love without truth can conceal harm. Safeguarding asks us to hold both together with care and consistency. To live this well requires ongoing conversion.

In the Franciscan tradition, conversion is lifelong. We are continually called back to the Gospel, to humility, and to honesty in our relationships. This includes how we respond to harm, how we carry responsibility, and how we remain accountable over time. Safeguarding calls us to attentiveness, honesty about failure, and the courage to build structures that endure beyond good intentions.

Forgiveness is essential to faith, but safeguarding relies on clear boundaries. Forgiveness does not remove risk, and love does not replace accountability. Our tradition reminds us that good intentions alone are not enough; clarity and consistency are necessary.

This session invites reflection on how safeguarding shapes everyday life—our behaviour, language, and decisions.

It challenges us to move beyond reaction to thoughtful practice, holding together compassion and boundaries.

This is not about perfection, but faithfulness: building a community where truth is spoken with love and trust is grounded in accountability.

SESSION THREE

CULTURE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND LIFELONG CONVERSION

DAILY PRINCIPLES DAYS 13–30

ICEBREAKER

Ask participants to reflect together:
“What helps a community remain trustworthy
over many years?”
What practices build long-term trust?

OPENING SCRIPTURE

EPHESIANS 4:15
“Speaking the truth in love.”

Pause in silence.

READING FROM THE PRINCIPLES BOOK

Invite someone to read Day Thirty – Profession
and Ongoing Conversion from the Safeguarding
Culture and the Daily Principles reflections.
Allow a short silence afterwards.

WONDERING

If safeguarding is part of our lifelong journey
and conversion, what might God be asking me
to deepen or strengthen now?



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

TEACHING REFLECTION

Safeguarding grows from the deeper life of Christian discipleship. It is sustained not only by policies, but by the attitudes and practices that shape a faithful community.

Scripture invites us to live with prayerful attentiveness. Jesus repeatedly calls his disciples to “stay awake and pray” (Matthew 26:41). Prayer sharpens our awareness of others and helps us notice vulnerability that might otherwise be overlooked.

Safeguarding also requires honesty about human weakness. The New Testament is realistic about the misuse of power. In the Letter of James we are reminded that words themselves carry power: “The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits... with it we bless the Lord and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:5–10). Safeguarding recognises that harm can be spiritual, emotional, or verbal as well as physical.

Paul reminds the Church that it is one body: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Safeguarding therefore belongs to the whole community. It is not the responsibility of a few individuals but part of our shared life.

The Gospel also reminds us that wounds remain part of the story of redemption. When the risen Christ appears to Thomas, he still bears the marks of crucifixion (John 20:27). The Christian community does not deny wounds or pretend harm did not happen. Instead it faces truth honestly and seeks healing with patience.

For this reason, safeguarding requires clear structures and accountability. Forgiveness belongs to the heart of Christian faith, yet forgiveness does not remove the need for responsibility. Repentance may express a change of heart, but it does not eliminate risk or remove appropriate boundaries. Safeguarding therefore holds together grace and realism: compassion for all people, and clear protection for those who may be vulnerable.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

FRANCISCAN STORIES

CLARE AND THE RULE OF SAN DAMIANO

Clare insisted on written structure and formal approval. Good intentions are not enough.

REFLECTION:

Do we rely too heavily on goodwill rather than clear systems?
Francis and Brother Elias.
Even within a holy movement, power distorted.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS::



REFLECTION:

Can we imagine ourselves capable of misusing influence?

FRANCIS' TESTAMENT

Near the end of his life, Francis wrote what we now call The Testament. It was not a new rule for the Order, but a heartfelt reminder of how the Franciscan way had begun. Francis looked back over the early days of the brotherhood and recalled the moments that had shaped its life — especially his encounter with the leper, the call to live the Gospel simply, and the commitment to live as brothers in humility and service. As the Order grew rapidly across Europe, Francis became aware that communities can slowly drift from their original purpose. Structures develop, responsibilities increase, and practical concerns begin to shape decisions. Francis did not condemn this growth, but he worried that the clarity of the original calling might gradually be softened or forgotten.

In the Testament he therefore spoke plainly. He reminded the brothers not to reinterpret the Rule in ways that would dilute its spirit. He called them back to simplicity, honesty, and faithfulness to the Gospel life they had first embraced.

From a Franciscan perspective, the Testament is an act of loving realism. Francis recognised that even sincere communities can drift over time. Renewal requires remembering why the community began and returning again to its deepest values.

For safeguarding reflection, this story reminds us that clarity and vigilance must be renewed regularly. Good intentions at the beginning of a movement are not enough to guarantee faithfulness in the future. Communities need moments of honest reflection where they ask whether their practices still reflect their calling.



MY THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

WONDERING

I wonder where our community might need renewed clarity or courage in order to remain faithful to our commitment to safeguarding and care for one another.

COMMITMENT EXERCISE

Invite participants to complete privately:
“In order to strengthen safeguarding in our community, I commit to...”
Participants may share if they wish.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FRANCISCAN SAFEGUARDING CULTURE

A Franciscan safeguarding culture grows from the spirit of the Gospel lived in community. It begins with prayerful attentiveness — a way of living that keeps our hearts open to God and our eyes alert to the needs and vulnerabilities of others. In the Franciscan tradition, safeguarding is not an external requirement but an expression of discipleship, where servanthood is made visible not only in words but also in the structures that guide our common life.

Such a culture recognises the importance of clear and respectful boundaries, ensuring that

relationships are shaped by reverence for the dignity of each person. It treats confidentiality with care, understanding that sensitive information must be held responsibly — neither hidden in secrecy nor shared carelessly. A healthy safeguarding culture also embraces professional realism. It acknowledges the complexities of human behaviour and the possibility of harm, and therefore welcomes appropriate guidance, training, and accountability. Within such a community, truth is spoken with courage and humility, even when it is uncomfortable, because honesty protects people and strengthens trust.

Franciscan safeguarding also requires patience and long-term thinking. Communities remain vigilant over time, recognising that protection and care are ongoing responsibilities rather than one-time achievements. Above all, it places the wellbeing of the vulnerable at the centre of its life, refusing to protect reputation or comfort at the expense of safety. In this way safeguarding becomes not simply a policy or procedure, but a faithful expression of Franciscan discipleship — a way of living that reflects humility, justice, and love in the life of the community.

QUESTION

Are you and your group confident and committed to earthing these in our Order ?

Prayerful attentiveness

Servanthood made structural

Clear boundaries

Responsible confidentiality

Professional realism

Courageous truth-telling

Protection of the vulnerable above institutional reputation



FINAL REFLECTION

Hold this question together: What kind of community are we becoming — and who is it safest for? Pause in silence.

CLOSING PRAYER

Most High and faithful God,
you called Francis and Clare
not to a moment of zeal
but to a lifetime of turning toward you.

As we renew our commitment
to our Franciscan charism,
make the conversion our hearts
and lives steady and enduring.

Where we have grown careless,
awaken us.

Where we have relied on yesterday's clarity,
renew us.

Teach us that holiness is not softness
but truth lived daily.

Form in us the humility
that welcomes scrutiny,
the courage
that strengthens boundaries,
and the patience
that guards the vulnerable over time.

Let our lifelong commitment
be more than words spoken once —
let it be vigilance practised quietly,
responsibility carried faithfully,
and love made accountable.

Holy God,
keep us turning,
keep us faithful,
keep us small in our own eyes
and steadfast in your service.

LEADER NOTES

LEADER NOTES – EPHESIANS 4:15

In Ephesians 4, Paul is speaking about how Christian communities grow into maturity. The phrase “speaking the truth in love” sits within a wider reflection about building a community where honesty, humility, and mutual care help the whole body of Christ grow in health.

Truth and love are held together deliberately. Truth without love can become harsh, accusatory, or destructive. Love without truth can become avoidance, silence, or denial. Paul suggests that mature Christian community requires both honesty expressed with care, and compassion that does not hide from reality.

In safeguarding contexts this balance is particularly important. Safeguarding requires truth-telling — naming harm, listening to

concerns, and addressing risks clearly. Yet this truth must be spoken with sensitivity and respect for those involved. It is not about blame or humiliation but about protecting people and strengthening the integrity of the community.

Leaders may wish to emphasise that “speaking the truth in love” also involves courage. Sometimes it means raising concerns that feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. At other times it means listening carefully when difficult truths are shared.

Safeguarding culture grows when communities learn to speak honestly, listen carefully, and act responsibly — always holding truth and compassion together.

NOTES ON BIBLE READINGS

This section invites participants to reflect on the deeper spiritual foundations of safeguarding culture.

Matthew 26:41 reminds us that attentiveness is a spiritual discipline. Safeguarding begins with awareness: noticing behaviour, power dynamics, or situations that could place someone at risk. Prayer helps cultivate this awareness.

James 3:5–10 highlights the power of speech. Harm in communities is not always physical. Words can shame, manipulate, or silence. Leaders should emphasise that safeguarding includes attention to language, spiritual pressure, and emotional harm.

1 Corinthians 12:26 emphasises shared responsibility. Safeguarding is not only the role of designated officers or leaders. Because the Church is one body, the wellbeing of each person matters to the whole community.

John 20:27 reminds us that the risen Christ still bears wounds. This passage can help groups understand that acknowledging harm is not a failure of faith. Honest recognition of wounds is often the beginning of healing.

Leaders may also wish to emphasise the distinction between forgiveness and safeguarding responsibility. Christian forgiveness concerns relationships before God, but safeguarding concerns risk and protection. Appropriate boundaries and safeguards must remain in place even when repentance is expressed.

This teaching reflection therefore encourages participants to see safeguarding not only as compliance but as part of a mature Christian community shaped by attentiveness, truthfulness, accountability, and care for one another.

CLARE AND THE RULE OF SAN DAMIANO

FRANCISCAN STORY

Clare of Assisi, inspired by the example of Francis, founded a community of sisters at San Damiano. From the beginning she understood that a life of prayer, poverty, and shared community required not only devotion but also clear structure.

Clare was deeply committed to ensuring that her sisters could live their vocation safely and faithfully. For many years she worked patiently to secure a written Rule for her community. She insisted that their form of life should be clearly defined and formally recognised by the Church. This was not because she doubted the goodwill of others, but because she understood that good intentions alone are not enough to protect a community over time.

By seeking written clarity and formal approval, Clare ensured that expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries were understood. Her determination helped protect the sisters' way of life and safeguarded their commitment to poverty and shared accountability.

From a Franciscan perspective, Clare's insistence on structure shows wisdom rather than rigidity. Franciscan spirituality values freedom and trust in God, yet it also recognises human weakness and the need for practical safeguards. Written agreements and clear structures help communities remain faithful to their calling and protect those who are part of them.

In safeguarding terms, Clare's example reminds us that healthy communities rely not only on goodwill but also on clear policies, transparent structures, and shared accountability. These practical measures help ensure that vulnerability is protected and that the life of the community remains trustworthy.

FRANCIS AND BROTHER ELIAS

Brother Elias of Cortona was one of the early companions of Francis and a gifted organiser within the growing Franciscan movement. As the Order expanded rapidly across Europe, practical leadership and administration became increasingly necessary. Elias proved capable in these areas and was entrusted with significant responsibility.

Yet the growth of the Order also brought tensions. Francis had envisioned a brotherhood marked by humility, simplicity, and minority — a community where power was held lightly and where the brothers served one another. As structures developed and influence increased, some feared that the original spirit of the movement was being overshadowed by authority, status, and control.

Brother Elias, while talented and committed to the mission of the Order, sometimes governed in ways that others experienced as heavy-handed. After Francis' death misplaced apostrophe he became Minister General, and disagreements about leadership style and direction deepened within the community. For some brothers this raised an important spiritual question: how could a movement founded on humility and poverty remain faithful when it grew larger and more powerful?

From a Franciscan perspective, this story is not simply about one individual. It reveals something more universal about communities and institutions. Even movements inspired by deep spiritual conviction can experience tensions around power, authority, and influence. Growth, organisation, and responsibility are necessary, but they also bring the risk that leadership may drift away from the humility and accountability that first inspired the community.

Francis himself had warned the brothers not to dominate one another but to live as servants. The story of Francis and Brother Elias therefore serves as a reminder that holiness does not remove the need for vigilance. Communities must continually return to their founding values, ensuring that authority remains accountable and that structures reflect the spirit of service rather than control.

In safeguarding reflection, this story helps us recognise that no community is immune from the distortions of power. Good intentions, strong faith, or inspiring leadership do not remove the need for transparency, shared accountability, and careful structures that protect the vulnerable.

FRANCIS' TESTAMENT A BROTHER'S REFLECTION (IMAGINARY)

I remember the early days.
We were not many then. Just a handful of us walking dusty roads with Francis, learning slowly what it meant to live the Gospel without possessions, without status, without the protections the world usually demands.

Francis spoke often about beginnings. About the day he met the leper. About the way bitterness had turned into sweetness when he stopped running away. For him, that moment was the doorway through which everything else followed.

But years have passed now. The brotherhood has grown beyond anything we imagined. Houses have been built. Rules written. Brothers sent to cities and courts and universities. Sometimes I look around and wonder how the small band of wandering brothers I once knew has become something so large.

Francis sees it too.

He does not speak with anger, but with a quiet urgency. That is why he has written what he calls his Testament. Not a new rule — he reminds us of that again and again — but a memory. A remembering of how the Lord first led him.

He tells us not to soften the Rule. Not to explain it away. Not to drift from the simplicity we once embraced with such freedom.

I can hear the concern beneath his words. Communities change. Habits settle in. We tell ourselves that small adjustments are necessary, practical, reasonable. And slowly, without noticing, the edge of the Gospel becomes dull.

Francis is asking us to remember.
Not out of nostalgia, but out of faithfulness. He knows that a community can begin in fire and end in comfort unless someone calls it back to clarity.
And so I listen to him now and find myself asking:
Where have we grown cautious where we were once bold?
Where have we protected our security instead of our calling?
Perhaps Francis is right.
Perhaps every generation of brothers must return again to the beginning.
And perhaps the real question for us now is this:

**Are we still living the life
we first promised to live?**