

INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDING CONFERENCE

2026

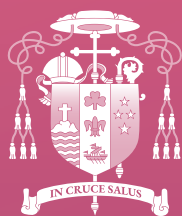
One Commitment, Many Contexts:
Safeguarding Across Cultures

Supported to Attend, Committed to Contribute:
My ISC 2026 Journey

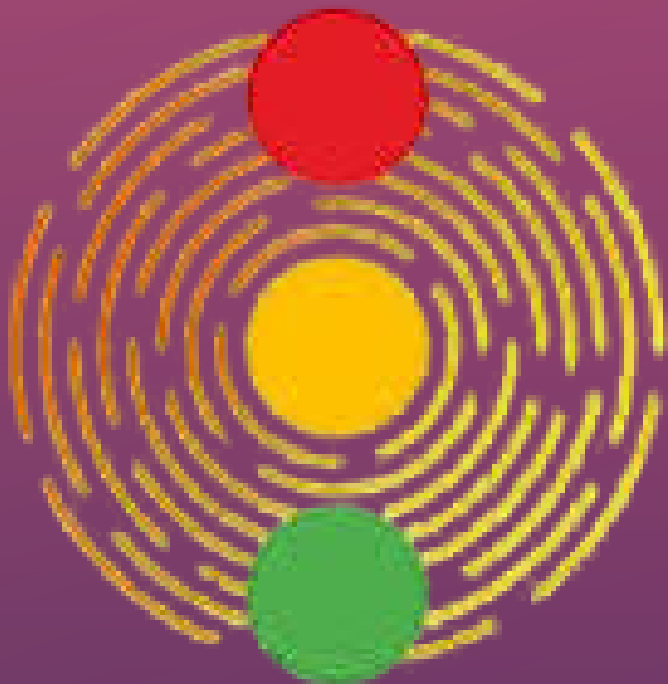


PONTIFICAL
GREGORIAN
UNIVERSITY
ROME, ITALY
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Catholic Diocese of Auckland
Te Taumata o te Hāhi Katorika



International
Safeguarding
Conference
2026



Acknowledgment

Thanks to the Catholic Diocese of Auckland's Mustard Seed Staff Development Fund, in June I had the privilege of attending the International Safeguarding Conference (ISC) 2026 in Rome as a facilitator, co-presenter, and participant.

As Safeguarding Coordinator for the Diocese since 2019, the conference provided an opportunity to contribute the voice of Aotearoa New Zealand to a global conversation while bringing valuable learning back to our Diocese.

Before the conference, I facilitated online discussions with participants from Māori, Pacific, Asian, European, and New Zealand backgrounds. Together, we explored how culture influences safeguarding, disclosure, trust, and accountability. A recurring theme was the role of shame in preventing people from speaking up and seeking help. Participants also stressed the importance of creating safe, respectful spaces where all voices can be heard.

These discussions informed a presentation delivered at ISC 2026. Where I highlighted the Māori concepts of tapu (the sacredness of every person) and mana (human dignity), emphasising that safeguarding is not only about preventing harm but also about restoring dignity when harm occurs. We concluded that effective safeguarding requires both strong systems and strong relationships, grounded in cultural understanding, honesty, and courage.



Summary– International Safeguarding Conference (ISC) 2026

Several strong themes emerged: culture, intercultural safeguarding, human dignity, migrant protection, trauma-informed practice, accountability, and moving beyond compliance toward safeguarding cultures.

Opening Keynote – H. Em. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization

Core Message

Safeguarding must be understood within the reality of a global and culturally diverse Church.

Key points included:

- Diversity should not be feared or erased.
- Culture shapes:
 - Identity and belonging
 - Ways of understanding the world
 - Survival and adaptation
 - Community life
- Culture is expressed through:
 - Language
 - Use of space
 - Rituals
 - Food
 - Rewards and recognition
 - Understanding of time
- Jesus lived within a particular culture but also challenged cultural boundaries, especially regarding inclusion and exclusion.

Reflection

Safeguarding cannot be separated from cultural realities. It requires understanding how culture influences relationships, power, inclusion, and vulnerability.



Culture, Human Dignity and Safeguarding

Presentation by Kokunre Eghafona (ONLINE)

A key message was:

"Culture is never an excuse for abuse."

Examples discussed included:

- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage
- Human trafficking

Although some practices may have cultural roots, abuse cannot be justified by cultural tradition. Human dignity and rights must remain central.

Main Takeaway

Respecting culture does not mean accepting harmful practices. Safeguarding requires balancing cultural awareness with universal human dignity.

Research Findings and Best Practice Themes

The conference explored research on safeguarding effectiveness.

Common findings included:

Three recurring principles

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Evidence and research-informed practice

What builds trust?

People need to:

- Feel heard
- Feel valued
- Be confident concerns are taken seriously
- See organisations acting in the best interests of children and vulnerable people

Trust develops through relationships and consistent practice, not just policies.



Migrants, Refugees and Unaccompanied Minors

Angela Rinaldi

Focus areas:

- Child-centred approaches
- Welcoming migrants and refugees
- Protection of unaccompanied minors
- Supporting asylum seekers

Important themes:

- See the person before the category.
- Human dignity should remain central.
- Catholic Social Teaching provides an important framework for response.
- Hostility towards migrants is often linked to fear of "the other."

Key Insight

Safeguarding should address both immediate protection and broader human development.

Women's Voices in Safeguarding

Douglas Russell Presentation

Research involving approximately 450 women worldwide was presented.

Key themes:

- Women's experiences and perspectives are essential for safeguarding improvement.
- The Global Safeguarding Alliance supports:
 - Research
 - Resource sharing
 - Collaboration across countries and ministries

The work highlighted the importance of listening to women as partners in creating safer Church environments.



Human Formation and Self-Esteem in Ministry Formation

Several academic presentations focused on formation.

Themes included:

- Human formation in seminaries
- Development of self-esteem
- Healthy identity development in priests and religious
- Relationship between formation and safeguarding

Recommendations pointed toward intentional formation that develops:

- Emotional maturity
- Self-awareness
- Healthy relationships
- Personal responsibility



These were recognised as foundational safeguarding measures.

Trauma, Violence and Recovery

Presentations covered:

- Survivors of genocide in Rwanda
- Trauma resulting from sexual violence
- The role of religion in healing and recovery

A key theme was that trauma-informed responses are essential if safeguarding is to be meaningful and healing.

Multipolar Safeguarding

One of the most powerful ideas discussed:

"One-dimensional safeguarding does not work."

The concept of multipolar safeguarding emphasised:

- Multiple perspectives
- Shared responsibility
- Collaboration across cultures
- Ongoing connection and dialogue

Important reflections:

- No one person or culture has all the answers.
- Safeguarding is more than guidelines.
- Change requires collective commitment.
- Different perspectives strengthen safeguarding systems.



Major Keynote Speaker:
Beyond Compliance – Safeguarding in Intercultural Contexts
Presenter: Fr Benedict

This was one of the most significant sessions.

Main Message

Safeguarding must go:

Beyond compliance.

Policies alone do not keep people safe.
Instead, safeguarding should be rooted in:

- Moral formation
- Relationships
- Community responsibility
- Human dignity

Confucian Ethical Framework

Several concepts were explored:

Ren (Humaneness)

- Compassion
- Benevolence
- Shared responsibility
- Care for others

Li (Appropriate Conduct)

- Respectful behaviour
- Healthy boundaries
- Social responsibility
- Ethical conduct in daily life

Jing (Respect and Reverence)

- Awareness of dignity
- Attention to vulnerability
- Respectful responses to others

These concepts were presented as potentially enriching safeguarding cultures.



SWOT Analysis from the Preparatory online sessions.

Strengths

- Community responsibility
- Compassion
- Lifelong self-reflection
- Family support
- Prevention focus

Weaknesses

- Historical patriarchy
- Potential suppression of disclosure
- Need for trauma-informed approaches
- Limited accountability structures

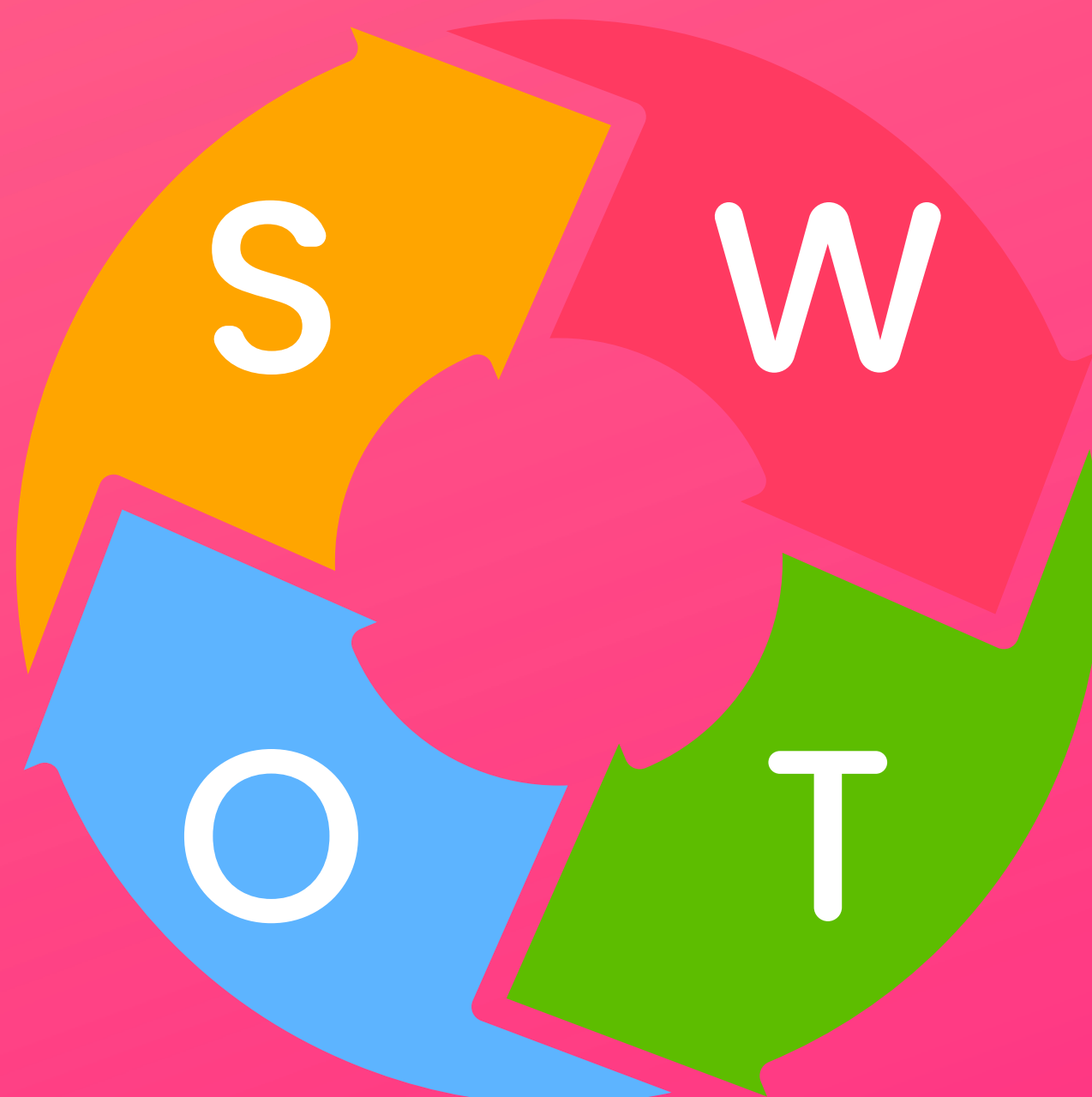
Opportunities

- Family-centred safeguarding
- Intercultural dialogue
- Inclusive safeguarding models
- Stronger reporting cultures

Threats

- Authoritarian leadership
- Misuse of obedience
- Undue deference to authority
- Under-reporting
- Pressure to protect reputation over people

A very practical analysis of safeguarding risks and opportunities across cultures.



Intercultural Communication and Safeguarding

Several sessions focused on adapting safeguarding across cultures.

Three Key ideas

- Culturally sensitive safeguarding
- Contextual reporting and support systems
- Universal principles with local adaptation

A recurring message was:

Safeguarding frameworks must be culturally appropriate, or they risk becoming technically correct but ineffective.



Taking Culture Seriously

Presentations emphasised:

- Culture influences safeguarding success.
- Shared cultural values can support child protection.
- Effective safeguarding requires community involvement.
- "It takes a village to raise a child" was referenced as a safeguarding principle.

Examples included work from:

Kenya

Australia

Religious congregations working across multiple cultures

Compliance and Intercultural Practice Workshop

A practical session explored working in unfamiliar cultural environments.

Commitments for Practice

Participants were encouraged to:

1. Cultivate cultural humility.
2. Value local strengths and treasures.
3. Learn local language and communication styles.
4. Take socio-cultural challenges seriously.
5. Work with cultural interpreters.
6. Understand local power dynamics.



Key Lesson

Effective safeguarding requires learning before leading.

Research Presentations

Research topics included:

- Human formation in training
- Experiences of religion
- Male disclosure of sexual abuse in India
- Intrafamilial abuse in Ghana
- Cultural influences on disclosure
- Gang involvement and exploitation

A common theme was that culture strongly shapes:

- How abuse is understood
- Whether people disclose
- How communities respond
- Access to support and justice

Friday Research Sessions

Prof. Jörg Fegert

Topics included:

- Psychiatry
- Victims and perpetrators
- Migration
- Cultural differences
- International safeguarding research

Questions around:

- Secrecy
- Disclosure
- Cross-cultural responses were explored

Trauma-Informed and Intersectional Practice

A strong emphasis was placed on:

- Trauma-informed safeguarding
- Intersectionality
- Integrated responses
- Understanding multiple vulnerabilities

Safeguarding was presented as requiring both cultural awareness and trauma awareness simultaneously.



Survivor Voice – Online Abuse

A particularly powerful survivor-focused session highlighted the impact of online abuse.

Themes included:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Fear of rejection
- Social isolation
- Not being believed
- Long-term emotional consequences

The session reinforced the importance of listening to survivors and creating safe disclosure pathways.



Overall Conference Themes

The strongest messages running through the conference were:

1. Culture matters

Safeguarding must understand and engage with culture rather than ignore it.

2. Culture is not an excuse for abuse

Human dignity remains non-negotiable.

3. Move beyond compliance

Policies alone do not create safety; relationships, formation, accountability and culture do.

4. Safeguarding is relational

Trust, listening, participation and community engagement are essential.

5. Trauma-informed practice is essential

Responses must recognise the realities of trauma and survivor experience.

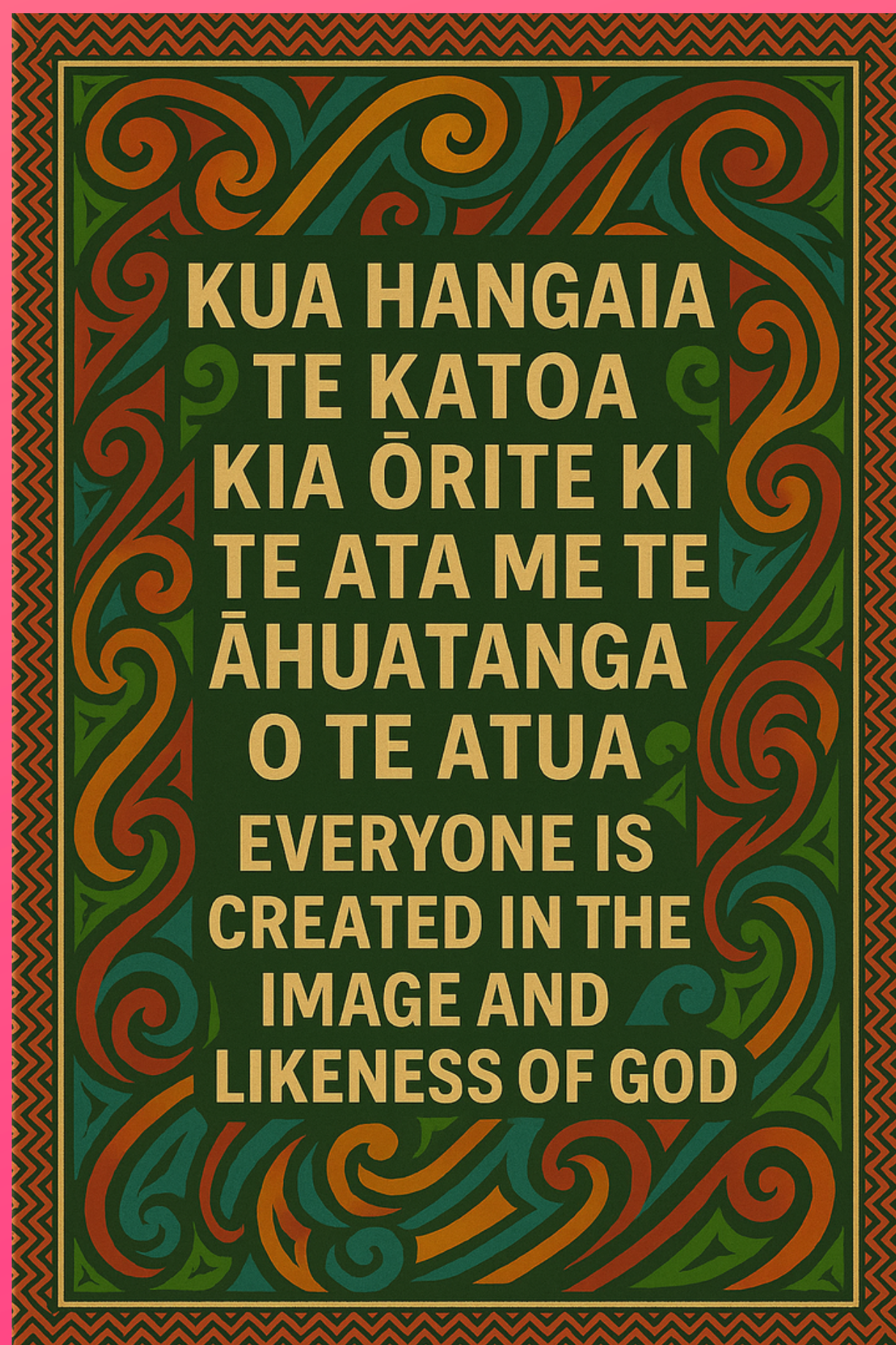
6. Multipolar and intercultural safeguarding is the future

Different cultures, disciplines and perspectives must work together to create effective safeguarding systems.

7. Human dignity is the foundation

Whether discussing migrants, survivors, formation, online abuse or cultural practice, the consistent message was:

Protect the dignity, wellbeing and voice of every person.



ONE COMMITMENT, MANY CONTEXTS

Safeguarding Across Cultures

