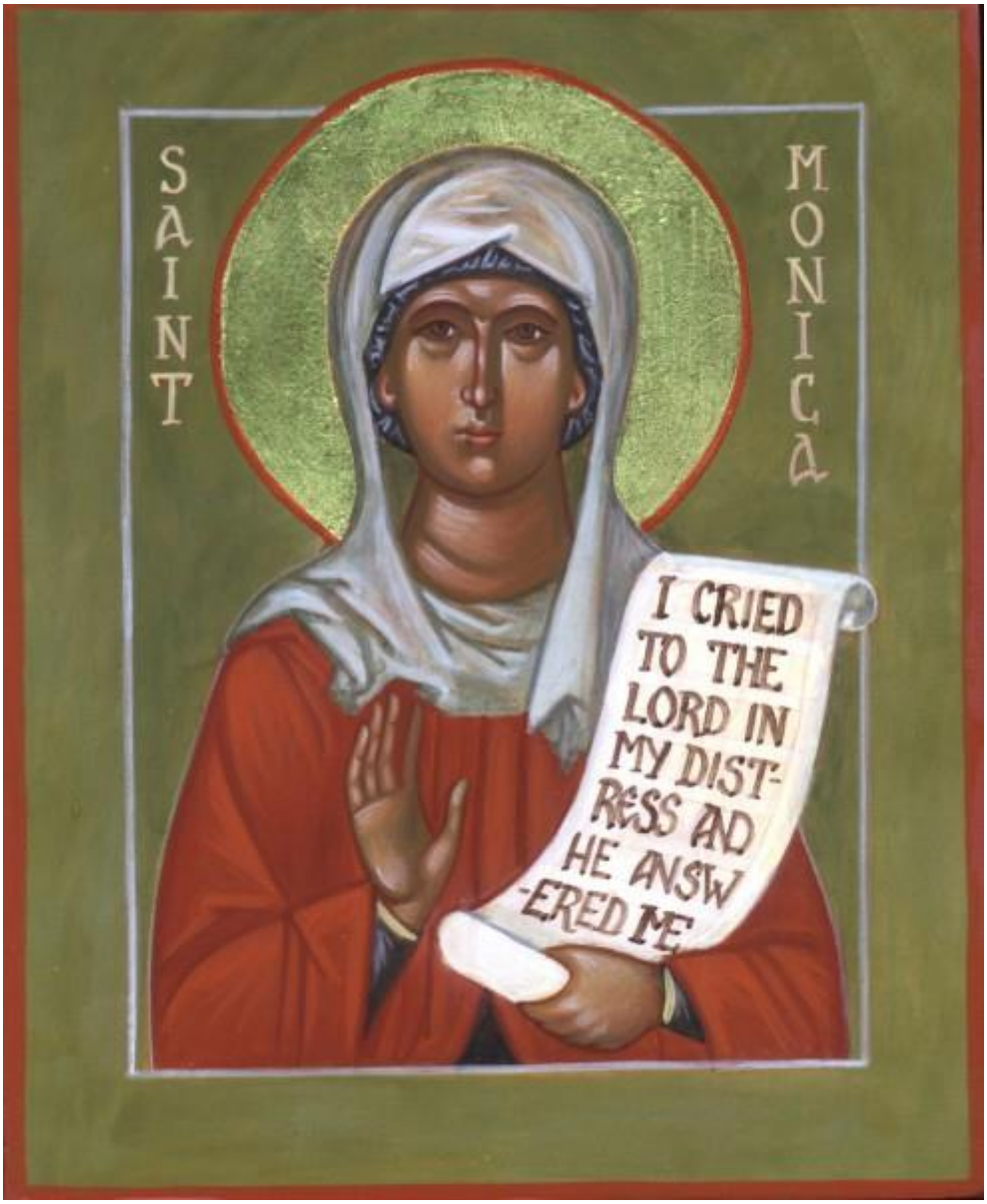
Safeguarding Saints for 'White Ribbon Day' in the Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough and Hallam



Bishop's Introduction

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Across the Universal Church and in our own extended diocesan family, we have a particular responsibility to promote the dignity of every person and to foster relationships characterised by respect, compassion and care.

The White Ribbon Campaign is a global movement which for 35 years has been engaging with men and boys to help prevent any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls. Violence can take many forms: domestic abuse, financial or coercive control, sexual violence, harassment and intimidation. It can affect people in every community, including those connected with our parishes, schools and families.

Across the centuries, many female saints and martyrs of all ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities have suffered the effects of violence and abuse during their lives; this short booklet, produced for White Ribbon Day 2026, introduces us to just a few of them. They intercede to bring hope, healing and comfort to today's victims and survivors who turn to the Lord in their distress.

Together with our Oratory of St Joseph Young Men's Group, I commend this 'White Ribbon' joint initiative from Diocesan Safeguarding and Communications to all our clergy and laity, and I encourage everyone, particularly men and boys, to take as their model the gentleness of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd; challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours, and promoting relationships founded on dignity, respect and equality.



The Right Reverend Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds
Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Middlesbrough
Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Hallam

'White Ribbon Day' 2026 from 25 November to 10 December

St Eulalia (290-304)
Feast Day: 10 December



Eulalia is a Spanish saint claimed by both Merida and Barcelona. Although only a young girl, she spoke her mind, bravely proclaiming her Christian faith in public and repudiating the pagan gods and goddesses and the cruel men who served them. Despite all attempts at flattery and bribery to win her round, she refused to submit to the Emperor's will. She underwent a crucifixion and was burned at the stake and is a Patron Saint of those who suffer any form of physical or psychological torture.

St Agnes (c. 291-304)

Feast Day: 21 January



St Agnes was put to death by the sword aged about 12 or 13. She had rejected the advances of a powerful young Roman official who avenged himself by denouncing her as a Christian. The laws of Rome did not then permit a chaste virgin to be executed, so the authorities imprisoned her in a brothel, from which she was miraculously saved when her hair grew long to cover her nakedness, and those intent on attacking her were struck blind. In Latin, her name means ‘lamb’ and she is usually depicted with this symbol of purity and innocence. She is the Patron Saint of young girls and of rape survivors.

Blessed Laura Vicuña (1891-1904)

Feast Day: 22 January



Blessed Laura was born in Chile, but the family was displaced by the revolution, and her mother emigrated to Argentina with her two young daughters to seek work. The employer was a cruel man who inveigled her mother into a relationship with the promise of paying for the daughters' education, and for a time Laura attended a convent school where her Catholic faith deepened. When her mother's partner learned of Laura's ambition to become a religious sister, he beat her and exercised financial and coercive control by discontinuing her school fees. During her lifetime, she confided in the sisters at the convent and a school friend. Laura fell ill with tuberculosis and received more beatings from her mother's employer, which hastened her death. She was Beatified in 1988 by Pope St John Paul II.

St Agatha (c. 231-251)

Feast Day: 5 February



St Agatha was a young Sicilian woman of great virtue and purity. She was pursued by a man who wished to force her into marriage, her story is remarkably similar to that of St Agnes – but Agatha suffered ever more terrible tortures, including her skin being torn and burned, and her breasts cut off. Before her death in prison, aged 19 or 20, she prayed:

'Jesus Christ, Lord of all, you see my heart, you know my desires. Possess all that I am. I am your sheep: make me worthy to overcome the devil.'

St Josephine Bakhita (c. 1869-1947)
Feast Day: 8 February



St Josephine Bakhita is the Patron Saint of all victims and survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery. In 1877, she was kidnapped from her home in Sudan aged eight and sold into slavery. A succession of captors beat, whipped, and forcibly marked her. When freed, she became a religious sister and lived in Italy for the rest of her days. She will intercede to support and comfort all women and girls who have been trafficked, enslaved or otherwise exploited:

O God, who led Saint Josephine Bakhita from abject slavery to the dignity of being your daughter and a bride of Christ, grant, we pray, that by her example we may show constant love for the Lord Jesus crucified, remaining steadfast in charity and prompt to show compassion. Amen.

St Rita of Cascia (1381-1457)

Feast Day: 22 May



St Rita was from Cascia in the Umbria region of Italy. She became an Augustinian nun after being widowed but had previously endured 18 years of marriage to a rich, but quick-tempered and violent husband. She prayed constantly for her husband to experience a change of heart – and eventually he did. When he was later killed in a 'vendetta' or 'honour-feud', she prevented her sons from seeking revenge. St Rita is now a Patron Saint of all people suffering because of spousal abuse and family feuds.

St Dymphna (7th Century)

Feast Day: 30 May

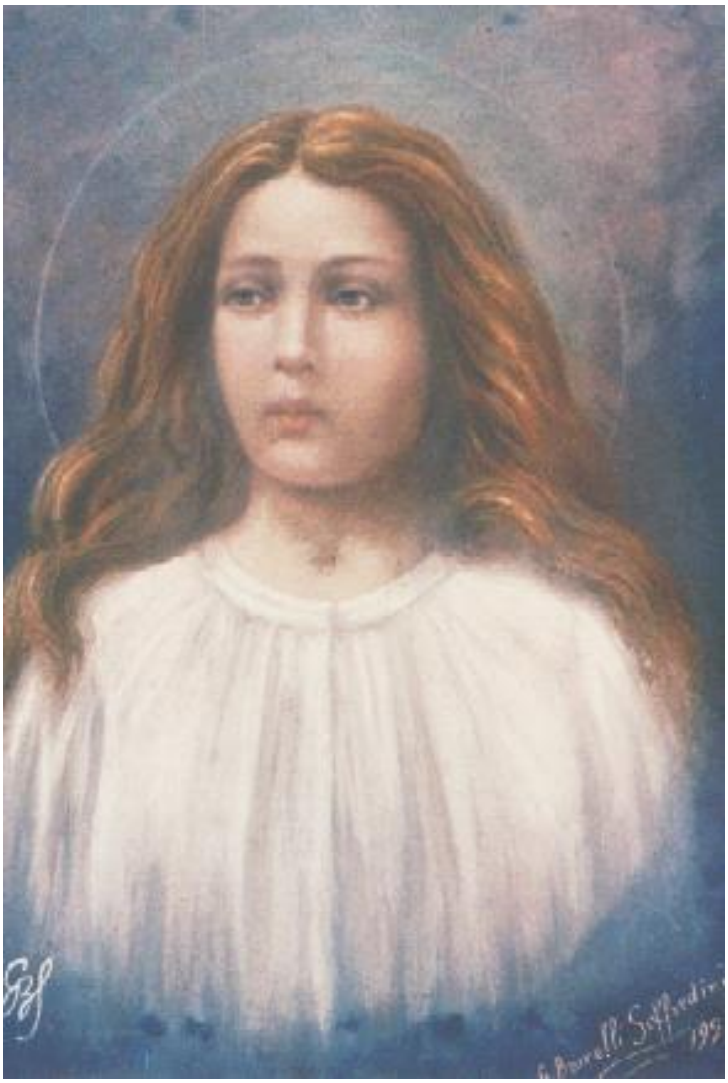


Dymphna was an Irish princess. When her Christian mother died, her pagan father's mind was turned through grief, and he began to have incestuous thoughts toward his daughter who closely resembled her mother. Dymphna fled to what is now Belgium, under the protection of her Confessor, Father (later Saint) Gerebran. Her own father's mental health had deteriorated still further and when he tracked her down, he killed first the priest and then his daughter. She is the patroness of incest survivors and all who experience anxiety, depression and mental illness.

Hear us, O God, Our Saviour, as we honour St Dymphna, patroness of those afflicted with mental and emotional illness. Help us to be inspired by her example and comforted by her merciful help. Amen.

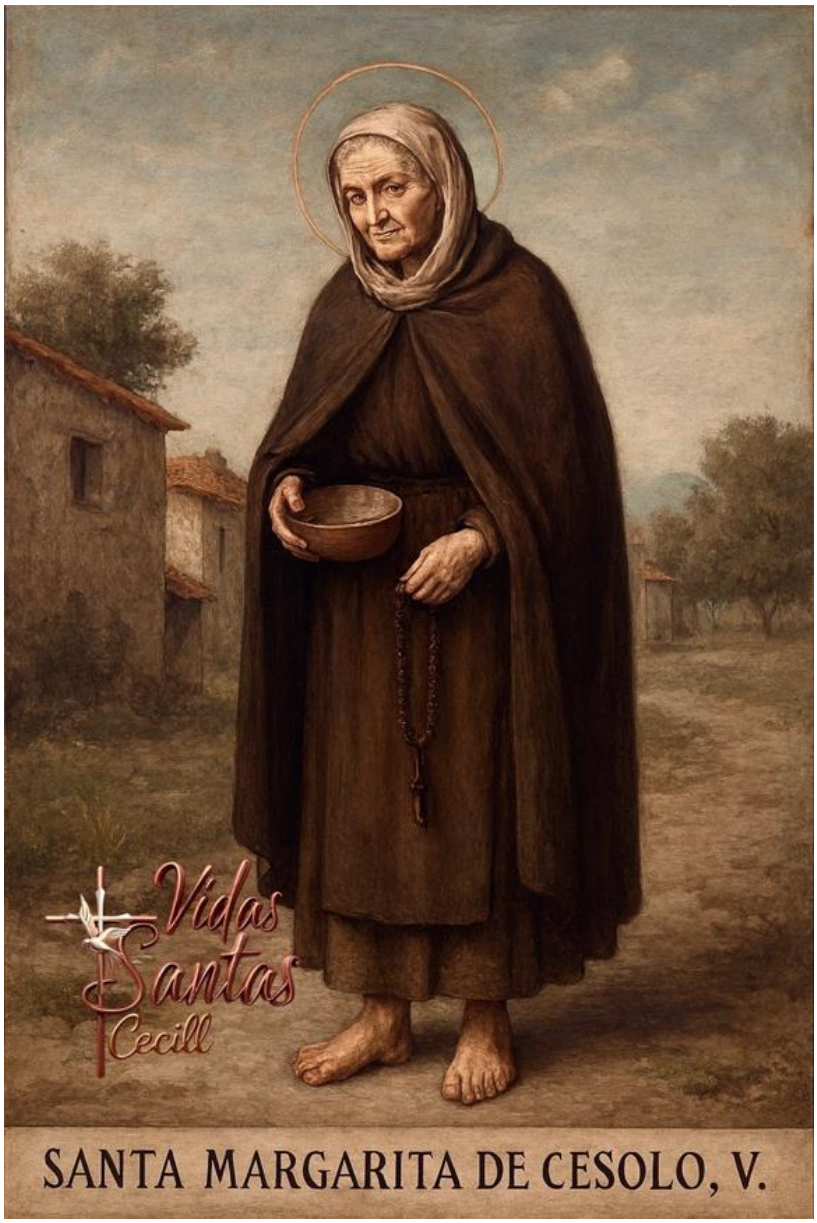
St Maria Goretti (1890-1902)

Feast Day: 6 July



Maria came from an Italian farming family so poor that when her own father died, they had to lodge in another family's house, where the father was an alcoholic and several of the sons had mental health problems. One of the sons, aged 20, persistently sexually harassed Maria. In an attempted rape, he choked and stabbed her many times and she died in hospital. After years in prison, the attacker received a visit from a Catholic bishop, and upon learning that Maria and her mother had forgiven him, he sincerely repented and when released decades later, he became a lay brother in a monastery. St Maria is a model Patron Saint for young girls who experience or are tempted by coercion or who suffer any form of abuse.

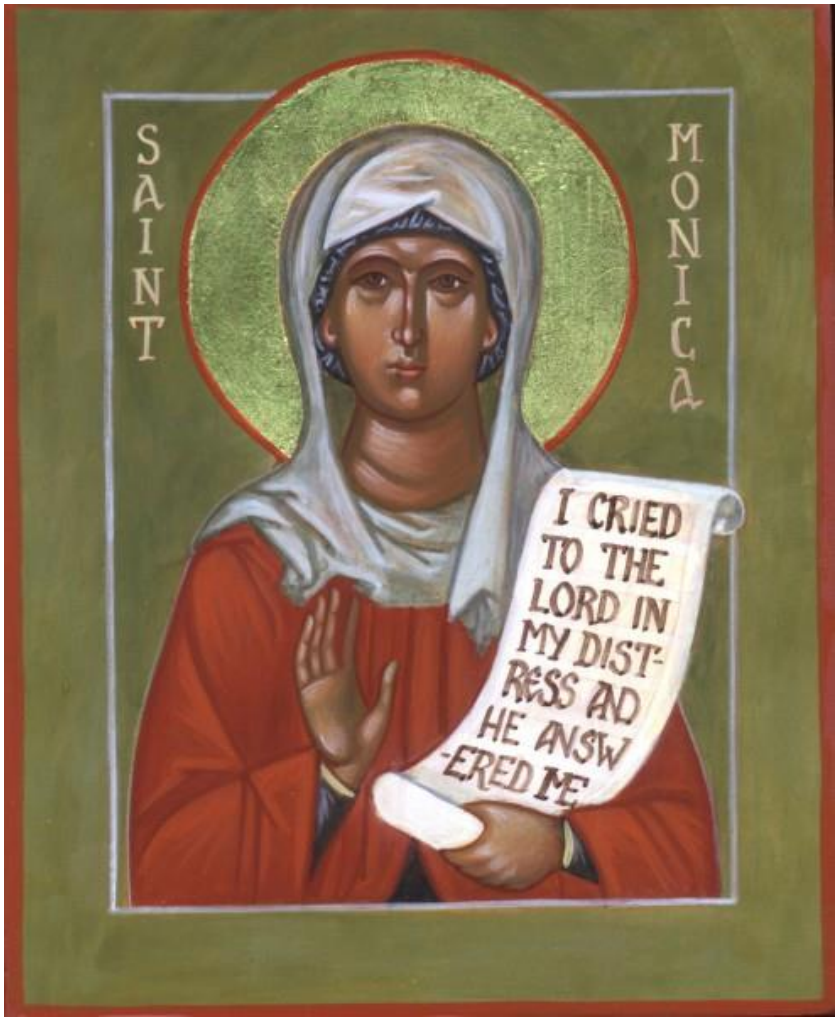
St Margaret the Barefooted (1325-1395)
Feast Days: 5 and 27 August



Margaret is the Patron Saint of brides and widows – but also of difficult marriages and victims of spousal abuse, as her rich husband was violent and abusive toward her for many years, although her prayers for him to repent were answered before his death. Throughout her life, she walked barefoot in solidarity with all those who were suffering or in need and served those who were sick and living in poverty.

St Monica (c. 332-387)

Feast Day: 27 August



Monica was a North African Berber from Hippo, in what is now Algeria. She was a Christian married to an unfaithful pagan husband with a violent temper. St Monica is best known as the mother of St Augustine of Hippo, who as a young man led a dissolute life with a lack of respect for women's dignity. His mother never gave up on him, following him to Rome, where at last her influence and virtuous example converted him - and both mother and son are now two of the Church's best-known saints. Her many patronages include all married women, especially those in difficult marriages; victims of adultery or unfaithfulness, victims of verbal abuse, alcoholics, and the conversion of relatives, especially lapsed Catholics.

St Reine (3rd Century)
Feast Day: 7 September



Reine, also known as Regina, is a French saint and patroness of those enduring poverty, impoverishment, and victims of torture. Born into a pagan family, her mother died giving birth to her and she was baptised by a Christian nurse and modelled her life on the saints, living simply as a shepherdess. Aged 15, she was betrothed to a Roman pro-consul, but even in the face of torture and martyrdom, she would not renounce her faith and trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reporting Safeguarding Concerns: If you have information of a safeguarding nature where any child or adult at risk is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical attention call emergency services on 999.

Diocese of Leeds Safeguarding can be contacted in confidence by email via Safeguarding@dioceseofleeds.org.uk - or speak to our Safeguarding Team on 0113 2618046.

Caring Safely for Others, published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (authored by Bishop Marcus) plus all our Diocesan Safeguarding Policies and Procedures are available to view and download via the Diocese of Leeds Safeguarding website.



Safeguarding is Everybody's Business – so EVERYBODY is invited to share their thoughts with us about Safeguarding in the Diocese of Leeds, in confidence, using our website's Safeguarding Feedback Form!

Anyone who brings concerns or allegations to the notice of the Church will be responded to sensitively, respectfully and seriously. All concerns and allegations will be addressed using the Church's national procedures and in a timely manner. The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) may be contacted on 0207 901 1920 or via email at admin@catholicsafeguarding.org.uk