



NEWSLETTER

Archbishop welcomes launch of 'A Safe and Welcoming Church'

ARCHBISHOP FARRELL has welcomed the launch, in June of this year, of *A Safe and Welcoming Church*. Published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the 'National Board'), this is the new 'One Church' child safeguarding policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland. *A Safe and Welcoming Church* differs from the policy it replaces, *Safeguarding Children*, in several important respects.

The new title *A Safe and Welcoming Church* is an acknowledgement that we have a different understanding of the role of safeguarding now from when *Safeguarding Children* was first launched in 2008. At that time, the Church was responding to a crisis brought about by disclosures of the abuse of children by priests and religious, and of abuse in Church run institutions, and the failure of Church authorities to respond appropriately to these disclosures. Safeguarding, we have come to understand, ought not to be just seen as a reaction to untoward and traumatic events. It is fundamentally part of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. Safeguarding is rooted in gospel values, scripture and Church teaching.

The new Safeguarding Children Policy Statement is as follows:

The Gospel teaches the importance of ensuring that the Catholic Church community is a warm, welcoming and safe place for children.

Let the little children come to me, and do not hin-



Archbishop Dermot Farrell

der them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:14-15)

Children are gifts from God, to be cherished and recognised for the joyful contribution they make as valued members of the Church. Our challenge is to follow the example of Jesus in cherishing them. Safeguarding is key to this important task and should be seen, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to embrace and

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Work we have done together has made the Church a safer place than it was in the past

THE NUMBER of new cases, that is allegations/complaints of child abuse by Dublin Diocesan priests, continues to decline. In 2023, four complaints were received. Three referred to deceased priests and the other one related to a priest already out of ministry. Ten years earlier, the number of new complaints was 29.

The great majority of priests and religious lead good and holy lives and never abuse a child. Studies reveal that between 4% and 8% of priests have been found to have abused children, which is much less than the popular perception. Of course, the scandal of abuse within the Church is not simply to do with the abuse of children by clerics and religious and in Church run institutions. It has equally to do with the manner in which many of those who disclosed abuse met with a disbelieving, defensive and sometimes hostile response to their disclosures to Church leaders. This is what some survivors refer to as 'secondary victimisation'.

The work that we have all done together, priests, religious and lay people, has made the Church a safer place for children than it was in the past. By putting robust safeguarding arrangements in place, we minimise the risk that involvement in Church activities provides a means for abusers to gain access to children. By raising awareness within our parish communities of the risks to the safety of children, we improve the standard of safeguarding not just internally but in other organisations as well. We make the world a safer place for all children when we accept our responsibility for their safety and welfare.

This welcome decline in the number of cases has allowed for a reorientation of the work of the Child

Safeguarding and Protection Service. As compared with ten years ago, more of our time and energy goes into looking to the present and the future and in supporting parishes and diocesan agencies to engage with children and young people through providing vetting, training, advice and support and also by auditing to ensure that practice on the ground is compliant with Church and national safeguarding laws, policies and guidelines. During 2023 safeguarding training was delivered to nearly 2,000 people. Nearly 13,000 vetting applications were processed, the majority for schools under the patronage of the Archbishop.

We continue to deal with the consequences of the past and, in this regard, it is important to remember that the impact of abuse, for the victim/survivors and their loved ones, lasts a lifetime. Our commitment to support those who suffered in this manner remains a priority for us. ■



The Child Safeguarding & Protection Service office at 20-23 Arran Quay, Dublin 7, D07 XK85

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encourage children's ministry, following the example of Jesus Christ.

The [Archdiocese of Dublin] pledges to safeguard children and young people and to support them in their development as valued and integral members of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Church's ministry will be inclusive and will uphold their rights.

Consistent with Gospel values, and with civil and criminal law, those who minister will do so with dignity and integrity, honouring their calling to ensure that children and young people are welcomed, cherished and protected, following the example set by Jesus.

This Safeguarding Children Policy will be honoured and complied with by all ordained clerics, by vowed female and male religious, and by all lay staff and volunteers in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The policy statement is accompanied by three core standards:

- Leadership, Governance and Accountability;
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding;
- Responding Pastorally and Responding According to Civil and Canon Law.

The first of these standards is about ensuring that those in positions of leadership commit to this policy, devote the necessary resources to ensure its implementation, and account for the manner of their implementation of the policy. The second is about ensuring that safeguarding practice, as defined in the statement, is reflected in all the many ways in which Church bodies carry out their mission. The third standard refers specifically to dealing with complaints and allegations of child abuse. It requires that such complaints are dealt with in accordance with civil and Church law, policy and guidelines; that those who make such complaints receive a pastoral response; and that those against whom allegations are made are treated justly. ■



On Safeguarding Day, we reflect on our engagement with children

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, is diocesan Safeguarding Day. This year, to mark the launch of the Church's new safeguarding policy, the theme of Safeguarding Day is 'A Safe and Welcoming Church'. Parishes are asked to reflect on their engagement with children and the ways in which they welcome children and value their involvement in parish activities.

Covid-19 had a major negative impact on ministry with children across the Archdiocese and some parishes have found it difficult to re-engage in children's ministry. With the gradual shift towards parishes taking over responsibility for sacramental preparation from the schools, this is not a sustainable position.

Many parishes are taking a lead in this area by re-introducing altar servers and children's choirs, among other initiatives.

As ever, the CSPS team is available to offer advice and support. There are a range of relevant publications and resources on our website, csp.dublindiocese.ie.

During September we will distribute resources to parishes for use on diocesan Safeguarding Day. These will include a letter from Archbishop Farrell, Prayer of the Faithful, and a suggested text for use on the day. A personal address to the congregation on the ways in which we welcome and care for children is always going to make a greater impact than simply putting up a poster in the church porch. ■

For further resources and updates, visit csp.dublindiocese.ie



Outgoing CEO of the National Board Teresa Devlin, and Aidan Gordon, the new CEO of the board

Appointment of new CEO among several changes at National Board

TERESA DEVLIN retired as CEO of the National Board in April 2024. She had been working with the board since its inception, having previously served as Director of Safeguarding. Teresa brought great energy, enthusiasm and commitment to her work with the National Board. She made a huge contribution to making the Church in Ireland a safer place for children. This is evidenced by the decision of Pope Francis to appoint her to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2022. We extend our grateful good wishes to Teresa and wish her well for the future.

Our good wishes also extend to Niall Moore and Peter Kieran. Niall, formerly Training Manager, recently left to take up a position with the Church of Ireland. Peter retired from his position as part-time Director of Safeguarding.

Aidan Gordon is the incoming CEO of the National Board. Aidan is a social worker with considerable experience in child safeguarding and protection. His previous position was as Director of Safeguarding for the Archdiocese of Armagh. CSPS has had a close working relationship with Aidan. He was a member of the safeguarding team that worked together on the World Meeting of Families in 2018. We are delighted to welcome Aidan and also Lyn McDermott, who takes over from Niall Moore as Director of Training and Support. We assure them both of our co-operation and support. ■

How to get in touch with the CSPS team

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Vetting applications should be submitted to garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie