

Diocesan Office
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Diocese of Elphin

Response to the Publication of the *Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Elphin* by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)

Statement by Bishop Christopher Jones

I welcome and fully accept the findings of the NBSCCCI *Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Elphin* which we have just published.

Today, my immediate thoughts are with the survivors of child abuse everywhere and particularly within the Diocese of Elphin. Abuse of children in any form is reprehensible and completely unacceptable. It is a serious crime and a grave sin. It has caused incalculable damage to the lives of innocent children and their families. Such abuse is even more grievous when it is perpetrated by individuals who hold a position of trust and even more so when these same individuals profess a gospel which speaks of love, justice and care for the most vulnerable in society.

To anyone who has been abused by clergy in the Diocese of Elphin and to their families and friends, I want to reiterate my sincere sorrow and regret that such crimes were perpetrated. I am acutely aware that my words of apology fall shamefully short and are totally inadequate. Having personally met and listened

to survivors of abuse who have recounted their harrowing experience, I am horrified at their pain and suffering and humbled by their bravery.

Again, I encourage anyone who has suffered the cruel injustice of abuse as a child to report the matter to the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána or the Diocese seeking support and help.

The publication of today's *Review*, for the first time, details an independent objective assessment of current diocesan safeguarding practice. It documents the progress the Diocese has made in terms of establishing robust safeguarding policies and procedures. These proactive safeguarding measures endeavour to guarantee that all church activities within the Diocese of Elphin are a safe place for children to be involved. They also ensure that complaints or concerns with regard to child abuse are dealt with in a prompt, sensitive and professional manner always in conjunction with the HSE and An Garda Síochána.

While I am greatly heartened by the findings of the *Review* in terms of the Diocese's high standards in current safeguarding practice, it is imperative that our work in this area remains a key priority as we continually strive to fully protect and safeguard children in our care.

I take this opportunity to thank all the people who have been involved in the safeguarding structures in the Diocese over the years: The Director of Safeguarding, Designated Persons, Priests, the Safeguarding Committee, the Case Management Committee, Support Persons, and the Director of our Pastoral Development Office. I thank local Parish Representatives, Trainers, Parents and all those who work hard in a voluntary capacity at diocesan and parish level to ensure that we are doing all in our power to safeguard children and all who are involved in church activities. I thank the HSE and An Garda Síochána for their professional advice and assistance over the years.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr Elliott and all the Staff at the National Office for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church for the diligent professional manner in which they have carried out this *Review* and for their continuing guidance. I urge everyone involved in our Diocese both laity and clergy to take time to read and reflect on the review for themselves.

Summary of the NBSCCCI Review

Most Comprehensive and Independent *Review* of Safeguarding Practice to date

The *Review* published today is the most comprehensive, independent review undertaken to-date of safeguarding practice in the Diocese of Elphin. It is a result of an on-site audit of safeguarding practice in the Diocese conducted by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) at the request of Bishop Jones during November 2012. It measures current safeguarding practice in the Diocese against the 48 criteria under 7 Safeguarding Standards which have been developed by the NBSCCCI in line with statutory guidance and best practice in the area. As well as reviewing the proactive safeguarding measures and structures in the Diocese the auditors reviewed case files and conducted interviews with key safeguarding personnel.

Diocesan Safeguarding Practice Commended

The *Review* highly commends the level of safeguarding practice in the Diocese across all seven standards, indicating that the reviewers “*were supplied with an impressive range of documentation ... of a very high standard, well produced and easily accessible.*” (p.6). The reviewers also indicate that “*in many respects, the documentation represents an excellent example of the standard that should apply across all of the church in Ireland.*” (p.6) In terms of establishing a safe environment for children the *Review* states “*that this is an area where the diocese has excelled.*” (p.12). The reviewers commend the Bishop for his investment in safeguarding and in particular for appointing a full-time permanent Director of Safeguarding who is responsible for safeguarding practice in conjunction with the Safeguarding Committee. They also commend the support given to safeguarding by enthusiastic and committed people at both diocesan and parish level.

Review of the Processing of Complaints and Expressions of Concern

The *Review* process dealt with complaints and expressions of concern against clergy received from January 1975 to November 2012. The *Review* states that “*the overall incidence of abuse allegations within the diocese is not unusually high. They do contain a significant number of allegations which upon investigation were shown to be unfounded.*” (p. 9).

The *Review* indicates that while there were some delays in reporting in the past “*through a belief that they had been reported or through a misunderstanding that another Church authority had already done so. The impression gained by the reviewers was that practice in this area has become much tighter in recent years.*” (p. 9). Current reporting procedures and practice in the Diocese are in line with statutory and church best practice.

Number of Criteria Met and Recommendations Made

Out of 48 criteria the Diocese has “fully met” 47 criteria and “partially met” one at the time of the *Review*. The one criterion “partially met” refers to the gathering of feedback on policy and procedures from parents and children. While the Diocese includes feedback from parents, children and other stakeholders as part of its current policy for periodically reviewing its safeguarding practices, the NBSCCCI asks that the next revision of the policy document includes concrete examples of how feedback from parents and children is gathered.

The *Review* lists six recommendations in total as to how the Diocese can continue to ensure it enhances and develops its safeguarding practice into the future. These recommendations range from the incorporation of very recent developments in church safeguarding guidance into the next revision of diocesan safeguarding policy and procedures, to ensuring that Bishop Jones’ successor receives a comprehensive induction into what safeguarding activities take place in the diocese. The Diocese, through its Safeguarding Office, has developed an implementation plan for all six recommendations.

Reassurance for all Involved in the Life of the Church in Elphin

The Diocese hopes that the publication of the *Review* will reassure parents, children, clergy, volunteers and the general public, that the Diocese has put in place all proactive and preventative measures possible to ensure the safety of children and volunteers into the future. It also affirms that the Diocese operates robust procedures to promptly, sensitively, and professionally deal with all complaints and expressions of concern in conjunction with the HSE and An Garda Síochána.

Invitation to Read and Reflect on the *Review* in Full

The full *Review* is available at www.elphindiocese.ie and on the NBSCCCI website at www.safeguarding.ie.

Contact Information for those Seeking Assistance with Safeguarding Concerns

Anyone who has a child safeguarding concern may contact the following:

Designated Persons

Fr. Ray Browne on 086 865 2387; Mrs Mary Nicholson on 086 375 0277

HSE

H.S.E. West (Sligo) Tel: 071 9155133.

H.S.E. West (Boyle) Tel: 071 96 62087

H.S.E. West (Roscommon) Tel: 090 6637528/9

H.S.E. West (Castlerea) Tel: 090 66 37842/3/8

H.S.E. West (Galway) Tel: 091 523122.

Garda Síochána

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit

National Bureau of Criminal Investigation

Garda Headquarters

Harcourt Square

Dublin 2

Telephone (01) 6663430

Email: dvsaiu@garda.ie.

Or Contact your local Garda Station or Garda Confidential Service Tel: 1800 666 111

Director of Safeguarding

Frank McGuinness

St. Mary's

Temple Street

Sligo

087 9880690

Support/Counselling

Towards Healing is an organisation which provides telephone counselling and a counselling and psychotherapy referral service for people who have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse when they were children, by persons working for the Catholic Church in Ireland. Elphin Diocese supports the work of the *Towards Healing* service, which can be contacted by calling: free phone: 1800 - 303416 from anywhere in Ireland or 0800 - 0963315 from Northern Ireland or the UK. Or visit their website www.towardshealing.ie

The HSE National Counselling Service (NCS) is a professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy service available free of charge in all regions of the Health Services Executive. Our client group are adults who have experienced trauma and abuse in childhood with priority given to adult survivors of institutional abuse in Ireland. Free phone 1800 234 119 Northwest. Further information is available on <http://www.hse-ncs.ie/en/>

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