



Diocese of Elphin

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

**Diocesan Safeguarding Children
Annual Report
January 2012 – June 2013**





A word from the Bishop

The last 18 months have seen significant advancements in our commitment to the work of Safeguarding Children in our Diocese. This Newsletter, which is the fourth publication of this nature, details all major advancements at both national and diocesan levels and serves to communicate the Diocese's on-going commitment to Safeguarding Children.

Key among these developments has been the *Review* by the National Board for Safeguarding Children of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Elphin. This was a landmark report in the history of the Diocese in that it was the most comprehensive, independent and objective assessment to date of our Safeguarding Practice including our management of allegations and expressions of concern.

I'm greatly heartened by its findings, which are very encouraging, with the auditors highly commending the Diocese across all seven standards of current Safeguarding Practice, indicating that we had particularly excelled in the area of establishing a safe environment for children and those who minister to them within the context of the Church. I encourage you to read the summary of its findings contained in this newsletter and the full report which is available on the safeguarding section of our website. It is imperative now as we move forward that we continue to enhance and develop Safeguarding Practice with even more vigour than before so that the great results we have achieved to date will not be undone but will rather continue to develop into the highest standard of best practice across all parishes in our Diocese.

Again I want to renew my heartfelt thanks to all who continue to participate in our Diocesan Safeguarding Structures, in particular to our Priests, Designated Persons, Trainers, those who act in a voluntary capacity on our committees and as local safeguarding representatives in our parishes. This work would not be possible without their on-going dedication and commitment.

Finally I want to acknowledge the enormous work done by Fr. Ray Browne who has held the position of Designated Person for the last four years and congratulate him and wish him every blessing as he takes on his new role as Bishop of Kerry.

I entrust the continuation of this indispensable work to the care and intercession of Our Lady, and pray for renewal of our Church especially among our young people.

+ Christopher Jones



Christopher Jones DD
Bishop of Elphin

Diocese Commended for Safeguarding Practices

An independent *Review* of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Elphin, which was carried out by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI), has commended Bishop Christopher Jones and the Diocese of Elphin for putting in place comprehensive policies, procedures, structures and practices to safeguarding children and handle allegations and expressions of concern relating to child abuse.

The *Review* published on the 24th April 2013 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.

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.”* 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.”* In terms of establishing a safe environment for children the *Review* states *“that this is an area where the diocese has excelled.”* 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.”* 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.”* 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.

Vetting of Parish Volunteers

The recent Parish Audits which were completed by the Diocesan Office for Safeguarding Children identified volunteers in each parish who have substantial unsupervised contact with children. These volunteers have been invited to take part in an in-service training evening in each deanery which is designed to cover core safeguarding policies and procedures. Part of this training includes training on safe recruitment practices.

Each volunteer in attendance has been asked to submit for Garda Vetting and the completion of other recruitment policy requirements as per our Diocesan Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

Safeguarding Training

During the last year NBSCCCI accredited training was offered to all Priests and Parish Safeguarding Representatives of the Diocese. The training which was part of their annual in-service covered 2 of the 4 modules from the new Safeguarding Materials. The remaining 2 modules will be offered to all Priests and Safeguarding Reps during their scheduled annual in-service training in Autumn 2013. HSE Keeping Safe Accredited Training was also delivered to the Diocesan Case Management and Safeguarding Children Committees and other Key Personnel during January and November 2012

National Case Management Reference Group (NCMRG)

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland established a National Case Management Reference Group in January 2012 on a pilot basis. The group's membership is comprised of members of the National Safeguarding Office, Social Workers, Civil and Canon Lawyers and others. Their remit includes the provision of high-quality advice to bishops and religious superiors/provincials when they are called upon to respond to safeguarding cases. The advice focuses on the management of the investigation and assessment processes and may comment on the 'fitness for ministry' of the respondent. Between January 2012 and March 2013 the NCMRG reviewed 67 cases belonging to 12 dioceses and 20 orders/missionary societies. Following the positive evaluation a proposal has been made to ensure that the NCMRG becomes a permanent aspect of the services offered by the National Board.

Guidance on Leave and Restriction from Ministry

The Bishop/Congregational Leaders possess all the necessary powers to take measures to promote the safety and welfare of children. Among those actions may be the requirement to restrict a respondent's exercise of his/her office, sacred ministry and apostolate if and when an allegation is received. To this end the National Board for Safeguarding has issued a document which offers guidance to bishops and congregational leaders when leave and restriction from sacred ministry and apostolate is required of an individual as a result of an allegation. The document was produced following an extensive consultation process and is available for download on www.safeguarding.ie

Review and Updating of Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures

The process to review and update our current Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures was begun in June 2013. This is in line with the Diocesan Review Policy. It has been decided that the Dioceses of the West will endeavour to develop a common Safeguarding Policy. The Director of Safeguarding for the Diocese is meeting regularly with his counterparts in the other five dioceses as part of this process. It is envisaged that the new template will be ready for publication in early 2014.

Feedback

The Diocese of Elphin values any feedback on its Safeguarding Children Policy & Procedures. Whether you are a member of Clergy, Staff, Volunteer, Parent, Young Person or Child all feedback is greatly appreciated and evaluated in our annual review of our Safeguarding Policies, Procedures, Structures and Practices. Please contact:

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Safeguarding Children Section on Diocesan Website

All pertinent information relating to Safeguarding Children is available on the diocesan website along with downloadable copies of all documents, forms, newsletters, reports, etc. See www.elphindiocese.ie/safeguarding-children.