



Safeguarding Children in the Diocese of Meath

Newsletter

SPRING
2021

Statement of Bishop Tom Deenihan on the publication of the review of child safeguarding in the Diocese of Meath by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland

The work of safeguarding, child protection and case management is critical in any Diocese. The mission of evangelization and the participation of young people in our parish life and liturgies are predicated on good protocols, policies and procedures in these regards.

On becoming Bishop of Meath in September 2018, I had immediate contact with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) in relation to obtaining their advice and support. That support was forthcoming and was very much appreciated.

A few months later, as a new bishop, I invited the National Board to conduct a review of child protection and safeguarding in the Diocese. The purpose of that review was to identify to me areas that might need attention in becoming a model of best practice in this area. The last review of this diocese was in

2014 and a second round of diocesan and congregational reviews is now well underway. This review, conducted in October 2019, is the result of that invitation.

The Diocese was commended in relation to the safeguarding work in our parishes and at diocesan level. That is a tribute to those who were involved in the Diocesan Safeguarding Team since the last review in 2014 and to those who are and were involved in this vital work at parish level. I want to thank them for their work. This is an area that will continue to enjoy my full support.

All case management in the Diocese of Meath since 2018 is subject to the advice of the National Board's case management committee but I want to acknowledge the time and work that Bishop Smith, the various Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs) and the other members of the diocesan committee

put into this work. It is a difficult task and their contribution was significant. In acknowledging their work, I also wish to express my appreciation for the confidence that the National Board has placed in me. I pray that it shall be justified.

The sad reality is that many lives have been destroyed by child abuse. When this happens in a Church context, it is a betrayal of all that we stand for and a denial of Christ's ministry who came that all might have life and have it to the full. Since becoming bishop in Autumn 2018, I have met and engaged with survivors of clerical child abuse. These conversations are humbling and shocking.

I remain available to engage with survivors in the hope that healing will be found and that faith can, in some way, be restored.

During the Covid-19 health crisis, and consequent restrictions, all safeguarding training events and meetings have been postponed. Once the restrictions have been lifted arrangements to resume these events will be notified. In the meantime, queries should be directed to <http://www.meathsafeguarding.ie/contact>.

Reports of any safeguarding concerns or allegations should be made to Ms Marie O'Sullivan DLP at 083 3175742 or to Marie Willoughby at dlp@dioceseofmeath.ie

Any other queries regarding safeguarding should be directed to the Diocesan Offices at 044 9348841 or <http://www.meathsafeguarding.ie/contact>.

Parish Audit Returns

Many thanks to the 52 parishes who returned their completed audit forms. A reminder has been sent to those which have not done so. The returns have been collated, analysed, and a summary is available [here](#).

General Observations

- It is notable, if not unexpected, that little activity involving children has taken place in parishes this year.
- Generally, parishes are compliant in creating and maintaining safe environments.
- No training and information sessions have taken place. The significant number of clergy and parish safeguarding representatives (PSR) whose training was more than five years ago remains an issue. Appropriate training will be planned when restrictions permit. A number of parishes identified a need for such training in their returns this year.
- Most parishes indicated that they have support systems in place for those involved in safeguarding activities. These are informal for the most part and frequently incidental. The Safeguarding Children Committee (SCC) will explore provision of options for more formal arrangements where necessary.
- Communication of the safeguarding message is reported as an important and well-resourced aspect of safeguarding activity. Updating of the safeguarding website has attracted a positive response.
- Records were reported to be stored securely, however, it is recommended that this table be reviewed to avoid ambiguity.

Review of returns

• **Activities involving children:**

Fifty-two parishes provided information. The most usual activities were altar servers (45) and choirs (21). Six parishes indicated that this was N/A. A minority, mainly the larger towns, listed additional activities: Children`s liturgy (2); Junior readers (8); Sacramental preparation programmes (7); Youth groups (10). Some parishes noted that their activities with children ceased for this year once COVID restrictions were put in place.

• **Up to date lists of all groups:**

27 parishes indicated that they had both a register of groups and of the persons in charge of them. 10 indicated this was not applicable. 2 indicated that a register of persons in charge was not applicable. This requires clarification.

• **Forms / procedures:**

38 parishes indicated they have all relevant forms and procedures in place. 7 answered 'No' to at least one procedure, mainly risk/hazard assessment. These will be followed up and these areas addressed in training/information sessions.

• **Non-Church groups using Church property:**

23 parishes indicated compliance with procedures. 25 indicated that this was N/A.

1 indicated that vetting was in progress.

• **Role specific training needs:**

39 returns did not identify any needs under this heading.

3 parishes requested that training be run in their areas for clusters of local parishes.

8 parishes indicated a need for full day or refresher courses.

3 suggested online training.

• **Display of information:**

All respondents, except one who answered N/A, indicated that **contact details** for DLP and information on safeguarding are displayed.

Details of **mandated persons** sent to the Bishop: 31 answered 'Yes'; 9 did not respond; 9 answered 'No'.

CCTV signage - 23 indicated this was N/A; 4 did not respond and 23 said 'Yes'.

• **Recording:**

This was generally reported as undertaken in accordance with guidance. However, the structure of this table should be reviewed in order to avoid ambiguity.

Follow up action to be taken

There was a disappointingly low response to this section: 11 parishes indicated either 'No' or N/A and 28 did not respond. Three parishes identified a need to complete a vetting process; one to complete risk assessment; three to have agreement forms signed; two to access posters and leaflets in other languages; two to deal with webcam signage.

Suggestions on improving safeguarding procedures

- Put the audit form online with more space for the list of those compiling it.
- Training for online ministry.
- Refresher courses online if restrictions continue.
- Support sessions 'post COVID'

Recommendations

- Consider feasibility of online audit returns.
- Review the audit form section on recording.
- SCC to consider need for training updates for clergy and PSR.
- SCC to consider requests for training to be provided in local clusters of parishes.
- The SCC will consider exploring options for more formal arrangements for supervision and support, where necessary.
- Develop a form for return of information on Mandated Persons.
- Consider issues re online ministry.

Support Person

Richard Lowry is the trained Support Person available to complainants in the Diocese of Meath. Richard encourages and supports the complainant in getting suitable help. He is particularly mindful of the vulnerability of the complainant during the process. To contact Richard, call 044 93 44841.

Training and support for keeping children safe

David Gavin and Antoinette Shaw retired in 2020. Work on recruitment of trainers to replace them has been undertaken. This is still in progress and it is anticipated that at least some new personnel will undertake training in the first part of 2021.

Statement by Bishop Tom Deenihan on the publication of the Report of the Commission on Mother and Baby Homes

The publication of the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Mother and Baby Homes in our country casts a necessary light into a painful episode in our social history. This report covers two such institutions in the Diocese of Meath, one in Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath and one in Dunboyne, Co. Meath. What I have read in the report is a cause of great sadness. I know that those sentiments will be shared by many throughout the diocese and country.

In too many cases, the experience of those who resided in institutions, which were managed by religious congregations and State funded, is a cause of shock and shame. The brave testimonies of those who entered seeking care but who subsequently endured emotional suffering are bleak and shameful. Like others, I found the details of the high infant mortality very distressing.

While a lack of resources and an intense social poverty go some way towards contextualising the period of this report, the lack of kindness and compassion, as identified by the Commission, is also clear. When church, state and society lose respect for the individual and forget that we are made in the image and likeness of God, dignity is forgotten and human life is not valued. Like many others, I am saddened and shamed by this report.

I have met with individuals who were either resident or born in these institutions. In addition to what for many were the unacceptable conditions and the inadequate assistance received, they have been unfairly burdened with an unwarranted but enduring sense of shame. There is also a tendency to forget that every child who was born in these homes had a father and that many of the women who gave birth there conceived in tragic or violent circumstances. The Report acknowledges this clearly. In many instances, the experiences of these women have been so painful as to prevent them from ever sharing their story with their families. It is a wound that they bear silently and shamefully. That is profoundly sad and we have an obligation to do what we can to lift this burden.

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Those who were adopted are desperate to seek information about their family. One such person that I met, though seeking for some time, located a brother at the time of his death. A missed opportunity and too late. Here much work needs to be done. For this reason, I welcome wholeheartedly the proposal by Government to establish a mechanism to assist those who are trying to establish contact. This is a welcome and practical step which will enable information to be shared, while acknowledging too that many who gave birth in these institutions want to leave the past behind them.

Today is a difficult day for all those who lost children to adoption or who were themselves adopted. We should also acknowledge those who provided a loving, kind and supportive home for the children that they adopted.

While we look back at the failures in the religious institutions that existed in our country at that time, we must also cast a critical eye on the structures of today to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not replicated. The personal stories contained in today's report speak powerfully and starkly to our world today. Let us not repeat the errors, failings and sins of the past that this report has, once again, highlighted and, above all, let us remember and value the dignity of each human person.

Towards Healing

Caring for Complainants - what support is available?

Towards Healing (www.towardshealing.ie)

Towards Healing is the counselling and support service funded by the Catholic Church to support the needs of survivors of religious, institutional and clerical abuse and their families.

The service offers counselling and other supports in a timely manner which are safe, respectful, cost effective, and of the highest quality.

Towards Healing offers a range of counselling and support services:

- Face-to-Face Counselling
- Psycho-Educational Group Work
- Practical Workshops
- Restorative Justice / Facilitated Listening Meetings
- Friendly Call
- Advocacy
- Structured Telephone Counselling
- Parent Coaching
- The helpline (Freephone 1800 303416) is open on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 11am to 8pm and Friday from 11am to 6pm.

(This notice was first published in the Winter 2019 Newsletter)

Risk (hazard) Assessments

Joan Walshe, acting safeguarding co-ordinator, attended a recent meeting hosted by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Parishes were advised that, to meet Tusla requirements, the Child Safeguarding Statement (incorporating risk assessment procedures) must be publicly available. The Statement is posted on www.meathsafeguarding.ie (S4.50) and a summary version of the Statement should be available in church porches. All parishes are required to carry out a risk (hazard) assessment for any activities engaged in with children. A template to assist in doing this is available on www.meathsafeguarding.ie (S4.15).

GAP Papers

The NBSCCCI has published a series of Guidance, Advice and Practice (GAP) Papers, posted at www.safeguarding.ie. Paper 1 (Safeguarding and Digital Media) and Paper 5 (Enabling a Child Safe Church) are particularly relevant to parish life.

Sacristy Register

A reminder that the Veritas hard copy sacristy register should be used for all attendances. It can be ordered online from Veritas.