

NEWSLETTER

FAREWELL TO JOSEPH

Our friend and colleague, Joseph McDonagh, retired as Support Coordinator in September. Joseph joined the service in 2003, the first member of the team, and helped to establish the service as a whole, not just the support service for those affected by clerical abuse. Joseph has written the following reflection:

"The last nine years have been an enriching time in my life. I am conscious of the different relationships and the responses of those I encountered on their journey of healing. The pain of their hurt was expressed in different ways, some embracing the support offered and using it as a means of regaining control of some part of their lives, while others were distrustful of the pastoral support offered. While I can understand this, I would wish that all people who suffered abuse would seek out support, be willing to take the risk, and see what the benefit might be to them.



The main reason I was able to continue positively providing this service over the years was my relationship with the people with whom I came in contact.

Some of that contact was face to face either in the office or in their home, some just by phone and some by email. But whatever way the contact was made, a relationship developed. It provided those contacting the church a sort of lifeline, or a link, that would begin to help them recover something they had lost, something like trust in themselves, trust in their relationships, or trust in their faith.

At times I have been overwhelmed by the positive transformation that occurred when I just listened, and

acknowledged that wrong had been done. It became a turning point for the better in some people's lives. Even though the past could not be changed or forgotten, the acceptance that what happened was wrong, and was not their fault, and that they were believed, made the difference.

Other times I have been overwhelmed by the anger of some people towards God and the church and all associated with the church, including myself, and the difficulty of trying to hold or maintain that relationship in the hope that some good might come of that conversation or subsequent conversations. Sometimes there are no adequate answers for what happened and in these circumstances it can be difficult to see a way forward.

I have been affected by the courage of people who came forward to tell their story. It has not been easy for them to share a difficult event from the past, not knowing what reaction it might bring. It has been my privilege to have been a witness to their courageous struggle as they tried to make some sense of what

happened and to find a way to move forward.

As I leave the service, I hope that anyone reading this, affected by clerical abuse, will feel confident that they will be respected and cared for if they approach any member of the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service looking for guidance and help.

There are good supports in place, through the service, which has links with Towards Healing for counselling and the Spiritual Support Service for spiritual direction, for those who are willing to begin that conversation and take the next step”.

Many people have come to see me over the past years to speak about their experiences of childhood abuse by priests. Those who made initial contact with the Diocese through Joseph invariably spoke of Joseph’s great kindness, patience and understanding.

When we encounter great suffering, we often feel helpless and inadequate. Joseph’s gentle presence was a reminder to many of that other presence, of the Lord who hears the cry of the poor and does not turn aside from our pain and our grief. As Joseph embarks on a new phase in his life, our prayers and our gratitude go with him

+ Diarmuid Martin

DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE

In the first edition of this Newsletter it was announced that a Diocesan Safeguarding Committee would be established to support the safeguarding work being carried out in our parishes and Diocesan agencies. Archbishop Martin has written to people, whose names were submitted by the CSPS, inviting them to join the committee. It is hoped that the first meeting of the Committee will be held before the end of the year.

ITS PARTICULAR FOCUS WILL BE ON TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF BEST PRACTICE IN SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN.

The role of the Safeguarding Committee is set out in Section 3 of *Safeguarding Children*. The role is described as supportive and developmental and as: “primarily focused on creating, maintaining and monitoring a safe environment for children in all aspects of Church life and activity and for advising on the human resources required for implementing best safeguarding practice across services”.

The Committee will work in close cooperation with CSPS but be independent of it. Its particular focus will be on training and development of best practice in safeguarding of children. It will not have a function in relation to the management of cases. The Advisory Panel on Child Protection advises Archbishop Martin on such matters.

The report of the HSE Audit made some recommendations in relation to developments in safeguarding policy and it is the firm intention of the Diocese that these will be implemented. An early priority for the Safeguarding Committee will, therefore, be in the implementation of these recommendations and this, in turn, will help us to prepare for the review of our practice to be undertaken by the National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church (the Church’s own monitoring office), which is likely to take place sometime in 2013.

HSE Audit

In October the HSE published a report on an audit it had carried out of child safeguarding policies and practices in all of the Catholic Dioceses having a presence in the Republic of Ireland. The HSE found that Dublin, along with Armagh, Waterford & Lismore, Clonfert and Elphin performed well across the range of categories examined as part of the audit. Dublin and Kilmore Dioceses were singled out for particular praise for the manner in which prompt action is taken in situations of immediate risk to children.

The report has its origins in the enquiry into Ferns Diocese. One of the recommendations of the Fern's Report (2005) was that an audit would be carried out of child protection practices in every Diocese in the country. The then Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, requested the HSE to carry out the audit. The audit took much longer than originally anticipated. There were initial legal difficulties to do with sharing of information. Further delays came about through the decision by the HSE to extend the scope of the audit.

This HSE Report provides confirmation that the progress noted in the Report of the Murphy Commission on Dublin (2009) has been built on and consolidated. The Murphy Commission noted that the Diocese's handling of child protection matters improved with the introduction of the first set of Church guidelines in 1996 but said that it took a while for structure and procedures to be fully implemented. The Report went on: "The Commission is satisfied that there are effective

structures and procedures currently in operation" (Page 4, section 1.16).

Some media coverage of these issues can cause confusion in people's minds. This comes about because there is often a failure to distinguish between how child protection matters were dealt with before the introduction of the first set of Church guidelines in 1996 and what has happened since then. When evidence is found of failure to deal adequately with child protection concerns in the pre 1996 period this is often presented as though it demonstrates that the Church failed to comply with its own guidelines. We should not minimise the failures of the past and the often horrific consequences of such failures. Neither should we ignore the fact that there have been situations where Church guidelines have not been followed. However, the interests of the safety and welfare of children are not well served when the progress that has been made is not acknowledged.

It takes considerable courage for people to come forward and to disclose that they were abused by a priest or religious. Many did so because they were determined that other children should not suffer as they did.

There have been major advances in the safeguarding and protection of children involved in Church activities in the Diocese of Dublin, as in many other dioceses. This was noted by a statutory enquiry and confirmed by the State's own child protection service. That is a significant vindication of the courageous insistence of the survivors that their stories be heard.

TRAINING DATE

A Child Safeguarding and Protection training session will be held on **Saturday 1st December 2012 from 09:30 - 16:00 in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 3.**

The training session is aimed particularly at priests, parish safeguarding representatives, parish pastoral workers and volunteers. Places are limited so early booking is recommended. Booking forms are available to download or you can contact Vivienne in the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service office on 01-8360314 or cps@dublindiocese.ie If you require any further information please telephone Fr. Paddy Boyle on 086 1011415.

Showcasing Best Practice

We want to use this Newsletter as a means of sharing experiences and learning across our parishes and diocesan agencies. We know that there is a lot of good work being done to ensure that our Diocese is a safe environment for children involved in church activities. We would be delighted if you would share with us examples of useful initiatives that others might want to emulate. If you have an idea for an article for the Newsletter, please contact Andrew at 01 8360314 or email andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie.

TOPICS FOR FORTHCOMING REPORTS

If there is a topic or issue that you would like to see discussed in forthcoming reports please email your suggestions to: andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie.