

NEWSLETTER

DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE

The inaugural meeting of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee was opened by Archbishop Martin on 19 January in Holy Cross Diocesan Centre.

The establishment of the Safeguarding Committee, which is required under the Church's Safeguarding Children guidelines, is a further manifestation of the Diocese's commitment to promoting the involvement and participation of children and young people in the life of the Church in Dublin. It follows from the launch of the Diocesan policy in 2011 and the publication of the procedural guide for dealing with allegations of child abuse against priests in 2012. The role of the Committee is supportive and developmental, primarily focused on creating, maintaining and monitoring a safe environment for children in all aspects of Church life.

Speaking at the inaugural meeting Archbishop Martin said: "Child safeguarding is not yesterday's issue but one that belongs to our today and to our tomorrow. It is not just about the negative shadows which have darkened and damaged our Church. It is really about how we as Catholic



Photograph by John McElroy, taken at the inaugural meeting of the Safeguarding Committee.

Christians respect the lives of the youngest and most vulnerable. Child safeguarding is a truly pro-life witness. It is about a fundamental vision of the Christian life, about a Jesus who reminded all of us that children are a sign of the Kingdom of God and that therefore our attitude to children tells a lot about our understanding of the kingdom of God."

The Committee is chaired by Aidan Browne. Aidan is a former Assistant CEO of the North Eastern Health Board and National Director for Children's Services with the HSE. Aidan brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position and we look forward to working closely with Aidan and with the Committee. The Committee is independent of the CSPS but members of the team will attend Committee meetings, report on their work and facilitate the work of the Committee. The Committee has a three year term of office.

The other members of the Safeguarding Committee are:

- Louise Fenelon, Parish Child Safeguarding Representative, Greystones
- Christy Breen, Parish Child Safeguarding Representative, Avoca
- Fr. Brian Shorthall OFM Cap., P.P., Halston St.
- Walter Balfe, Parish Child Safeguarding Representative, Inchicore
- Sean Feely, Parish Child Safeguarding Representative, Blessington
- Tommy Mac Donnell, Parish Child Safeguarding Representative, St. John's Clontarf
- Geraldine Magee, Catholic Youth Care
- Lorraine Byrne, Crosscare
- Anita Conlan, Accord
- Amanda Nordell, Vincent de Paul Society
- Fr. Seán Mac Giollarnáth, O.Carm. Knocklyon Parish.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Child and Family Support Agency

A number of initiatives being undertaken by the government this year will bring about changes to the child protection system in Ireland. A new Child and Family Support Agency will take over responsibility from the HSE for the delivery of welfare and support services to children and their families.

Mandatory reporting

The government has made a commitment to introduce legislation that will place the national guidelines for the protection and welfare of children, Children First, on a statutory basis. The legislation will create a legal obligation on those working with children to follow the guidelines on reporting concerns for the welfare and protection of children to the HSE. At the moment, organisations working with children are expected to follow the Children First guidelines but are not legally obliged to do so. Draft legislation was published in 2012. Amendments to this draft legislation are likely before it is passed into law, probably later this year.

It is the policy of Dublin Diocese to report all child protection concerns to the civil authorities, that is, the HSE and An Garda Síochána. The new legislation will not, therefore, lead to any change in the Diocese's reporting policy.

Withholding Information

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 was passed last year. It makes it an offence for a person who knows that a crime has been committed against a child or vulnerable adult not to pass the information on to the Gardai. Only certain crimes against children and vulnerable adults are covered by the Act. They are the more serious crimes such as murder and assault. They are specified in a Schedule to the Act.

Vetting

Also published during 2012 was the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Bill 2012. This legislation, once it is passed, will put vetting on a statutory basis. There will be a legal obligation to ensure that those who work with children and with vulnerable adults undergo vetting. Up to now this has been required by various organisations and employers, including the Diocese, and the legislation will give legal force to this. There was a wide ranging consultation on earlier draft legislation and the 2012 Bill has been amended to reflect views expressed during the consultation. The scope to the proposed legislation has been widened. For example, included among the types of work and activities that require vetting is 'promotion of religious belief'. The legislation if passed in its current form will give a legal underpinning to the Diocesan policy of requiring vetting of all involved in Church activities.

VULNERABLE ADULTS

Both the Children First Bill and the Vetting Bill make reference to 'vulnerable persons'. Some people are vulnerable to abuse by virtue of disability or illness and the draft legislation would give these people some of the same safeguards that are applied to children. A key issue in determining a person's vulnerability is whether or not they have capacity to give informed consent. An important safeguard for children is that they are deemed incapable of giving informed consent to sexual activities with adults. An adult who sexually abuses a child cannot offer as a defence that the child agreed to engage in sexual activity. The child may not understand what he or she is being asked to do and the imbalance in power is such that he or she cannot be considered in any meaningful sense to consent freely to such activity. Such situations can also arise between adults.

There are degrees of vulnerability. A person who suffers a bereavement may go through a period of reduced capacity to make informed decisions whereas a person with an intellectual disability may completely lack capacity to make certain kinds of decisions. In determining how best to protect vulnerable adults, it is important to be clear about the definition of vulnerability. For example, to initiate a sexual relationship with someone who is vulnerable by virtue of a bereavement might be inappropriate and unacceptable but is not a crime. However, to initiate a sexual relationship with a person with an intellectual disability may well be against the law (depending on the circumstances). The proposed legislation gives a 'restricted' definition of a vulnerable adult as someone who lacks capacity by virtue of illness or disability.

The National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church is currently drawing up guidance for the protection of vulnerable adults in a Church context.

Training Update

Over the past few months we have conducted a number of Training and Information sessions throughout the Diocese. These have been very well attended by Child Safeguarding Representatives, Priests, Deacons, Parish Pastoral Workers and parish volunteers. Garry Keogh, one of the Diocesan Trainers has been conducting training and information sessions in the southern part of the Diocese. We have also been meeting with the parish representatives from a number of deaneries. These gatherings have proven to be very beneficial, providing opportunities for parish representatives to share experiences and helping to bring people up to date with new developments in the area of training and best practice.

We have also, in collaboration with the Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism, developed and delivered to thirty people, a child safeguarding and protection awareness module for Prayer Guides. Prayer Guides work in parishes under the guidance of the Evangelisation Office. Two further sessions with Prayer Guides are scheduled for the near future.

Working in cooperation with the directors of Child Safeguarding and Protection in the dioceses of Killaloe and Limerick, we recently delivered training to a group of fifteen priest advisors. Further cooperation with other dioceses is scheduled for next March.

The training and information sessions being delivered throughout the Dublin Archdiocese are part of the new training initiative developed by the

National Office for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Over the past two years many parishes have sent representatives, priests and volunteers to take part in the new training. But there are still some parishes that haven't, as yet.

There will be another training day on Saturday the 9th of February in the Parish Centre, Holy Child Church, Whitehall, Dublin 9. If no one from your parish has been trained since 2009/2010, you might think about sending the present Parish Representatives or new volunteers to complete the training programme.

For further information call Fr. Paddy Boyle at 086 1011415 or if you wish to book a place on the training session on 9th February, you can call Ger Tierney on 01-8360314 (Monday – Wednesday, 9-5).

Below is a schedule of up- coming training and information sessions:

January 26

Information Session with priests, parish council, volunteers of Rivermount Parish

January 28

Information Session with priests, parish council, parish reps, Bluebell parish

February 2

Safeguarding Training with Vincentian Volunteers – All Hallows College

February 9

Safeguarding Training for Parish Representatives, 9:30 a.m. Whitehall Parish Centre

February 22

Training of Parish Prayer Guides

February 23

Safeguarding Training for Deacons, All Hallows College.

PARISH VISITS

Andrew Fagan has visited a number of parishes at the invitation of priests of the parish or parish pastoral councils. These visits are not training events but provide a welcome opportunity to provide information and to discuss the work of the CSPS. Recent meetings have been held in Clontarf, Rathfarnham and Navan Road. If you would like to arrange a visit to your parish please contact the office at 8360314.

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 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.