

# NEWSLETTER

## APOSTOLIC VISITATION

The *Summary of the Findings of the Apostolic Visitation in Ireland* was released in March. The Visitation examined various aspects of Church life and activity including the arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of children. The *Summary* states that:

*The Visitors were struck by the efforts made throughout the country by Bishops, priests, Religious and lay persons to implement the Guidelines and to create safe environments. In the four Archdioceses, the results of these efforts were judged to be excellent.*

The *Summary* was given a somewhat critical response in the media with some suggesting that it was a poor return for the work that went into the Visitation. This, however, is to miss the point (or perhaps, several points). The *Summary* is not the only outcome of the Visitation. For some the process was, in itself, an experience of healing, learning and affirmation. The Visitation to Dublin was carried out by a team from the Archdiocese of Boston. The team examined in considerable detail the Diocese's response to the abuse of children by priests. They met with those who

had been abused and with those working, as professional staff and as volunteers, to make the Church in Dublin a safe place for children. Those who participated in these meetings reported that they were listened to with courtesy, care and respect.

Those of us who work in the CSPS were anxious about the Visitation. We knew our work would be scrutinised. We anticipated a particularly onerous exam and we were worried about whether or not we would pass. Our anxiety was soon dispelled on first meeting Cardinal O'Malley. Immediately, by his demeanour as much as by what he said, he conveyed to us that he and his team had come to help us, not to find fault. This attitude was mirrored by the other members of the team. We are very grateful to Cardinal O'Malley and to Barbara Thorp, Fr. John Connolly, Fr. Bob Wickham and Tom Hannigan for their insights, suggestions, encouragement and support.

Andrew Fagan, Director of the CSPS, accepted an invitation to visit Boston in April 2011 and to learn more about the approach to safeguarding and child protection in the Archdiocese of Boston, as well as their work with those who were abused by priests. Andrew made many valuable contacts during this visit. One of those he met was

David. David was abused by a priest in Boston. He has travelled a long and pain-filled road to recovery. He now works with the Boston Diocese in assisting others who have been abused. David has become a firm and valued friend of our service and maintains regular contact by email. It is hoped that David will visit Dublin at some point to meet and share his experiences with people with whom we are in contact.

Although it was planned well before the Visitation the *Liturgy of Lament and Repentance* that took place in the Pro-Cathedral on 20 February 2011 was a fitting culmination of it.



*Liturgy of Lament and Repentance*

The text of the *Liturgy* was largely the work of those who had experienced abuse. During the ceremony Cardinal O'Malley and Archbishop Martin washed the feet of a group of people who had suffered through abuse by priests. This was a moment of real healing for many. It was not, however, the

end of a process but the beginning. Archbishop Martin said then:

*This afternoon is only a first step. It would be easy for all of us to go away this afternoon feeling good but feeling also "that is that now", "it's over"; "now we can get back to normal".*

*The Archdiocese of Dublin will never be the same again. It will always bear this wound within it. The Archdiocese can never rest until the day in which the last victim has found his or her peace and he or she can rejoice in being fully the person that God in his plan wants them to be.*

## Does Safeguarding Work?

Since 1996 when the first set of Church guidelines for the safeguarding and protection of children in Ireland were introduced many changes in practices relating to children involved in Church activities have been introduced. It is appropriate to ask whether these changes have had a positive impact. Have these changes in practices made the Church in Dublin a safer place for children?

In the first issue of this Newsletter reference was made to research that had been carried out on behalf of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. This research, undertaken by researchers from John Jays College of the City University of New York, found that there was an identifiable period in the recent history of the Catholic Church in America, the period between the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s, during which a high number of incidents of child sexual abuse

occurred. There were much fewer reports of abuse from before and after that period. This pattern holds true for the Archdiocese of Dublin.

The CSPS carried out a detailed analysis of 75 allegations and suspicions of child abuse that were received between 1 January 2004 and 31 July 2010. For 16% of this number, we do not have a date on which the alleged abuse occurred apart from knowing that they all involved adults making complaints about events that occurred when they were children. If we discount these, we find that 13% of all reported incidents occurred in the 1960s, 80% in the 1970s and 1980s and only 5% since 1990.

We have to treat these data with caution because they are based on reported incidents only. There may have been other incidents that we do not know about or do not yet know about.

## THERE IS A DANGER OF COMPLACENT ASSUMPTION THAT THE PROBLEM IS BEHIND US.

As Archbishop Martin has said, we are only at the beginning. The trauma of abuse is an ever present reality for those who experienced it.

These data nonetheless provide some evidence that the Church is a safer place for children than it was 30 or 40 years ago. It is safer, in part at least, because of the work that has been done to create and maintain safe environments for children. The Church in Dublin will continue to be a safer place for children than it was only to the extent that we persevere with this work, always alert to the emergence of new threats to the safety of children.

## WEBSITE

Our new website [www.csps.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.csps.dublindiocese.ie) went live in March. The new website has a cleaner, fresher appearance and is intended to be easier for people to use. It contains information on the service and those of us who work in the service. It provides guidance on how to make a complaint on a child protection matter. All the relevant guidelines: State, Church and Diocesan are available on the site. The 'Resources' section contains forms for use in safeguarding in parishes. These can be downloaded and printed from your own personal computer. The various editions of this Newsletter are also on the website.

# GARDA VETTING

In June 2011, the Archdiocese of Dublin published its revised policy on Garda Vetting. The original policy was published in 2008 and a commitment was given then to review it after three years. The major change to the policy is that all who minister and work for the Diocese are required to undergo Garda Vetting. The policy states:

*The Archdiocese of Dublin supports the principle that Church personnel who have contact with children and vulnerable adults should undergo Garda Vetting. Every role potentially involves contact with children and/or vulnerable adults, and irrespective of the degree of such contact, the Diocese requires all who are employed or who engage in volunteer ministry or works of service for the Christian community to undergo Garda Vetting as an expression of our common commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.*

This policy has caused difficulties in some parishes, particularly among those who have served their parishes for many years prior to the introduction of this requirement. It is important, therefore, to restate the rationale for it:

- As stated above every role within a parish involves at least some contact with children and/or vulnerable adults
- A policy of limiting vetting to those who work directly with children and/or vulnerable adults has been found to be impossible to implement in a consistent manner as different parishes interpreted the meaning of 'working with children and/or vulnerable adults' differently
- Perhaps most importantly, having a role with the Church confers a status on a person and leads some to believe that the person concerned enjoys the confidence and approval of the parish and the Diocese. Conferring such a status on those who could potentially pose a risk to the safety and welfare of children and/or vulnerable adults would be entirely inappropriate.

All information gathered during the Garda Vetting process is treated as strictly confidential and is securely stored.

The point of Garda Vetting is to gather information to inform the decision as to whether or not a person should hold a position within the parish. The decision taker (usually the Parish Priest) will evaluate any information received in order to make an informed decision. Information about minor offences committed in the distant past is unlikely to weigh against a person having a role in the parish. However, a conviction for violent crime, especially if committed against a child or vulnerable adult, would rule the candidate out.

The Archbishop understands that this policy is difficult for some people to accept. He does not want those who have given loyal service for many years to stop doing so because of this policy. He asks for your patience and understanding and is committed to keeping the policy under review.

## 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](mailto:andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie).

## TRAINING UPDATE

Since last September we have delivered the new training modules for Child Safeguarding Representatives, Priests, Deacons and Parish Pastoral Workers to all the deaneries of the Diocese. These modules have been designed by the National Board for Safeguarding Children. They are aimed at providing the necessary information and skills for those mentioned above in their respective roles in the Diocese in relation to the safeguarding and protection of children.

The attendance at the training sessions was very encouraging and all sessions were booked out, some over booked. It was found necessary to put on two extra dates, the 24th and the 31st of March to meet the demands for training. More training days will be arranged and information on these will be forthcoming when available.

We are also in the process of registering new trainers who will be recognised as accredited trainers by the National Board after they have been monitored by National Board Tutors. The new trainers for the Dublin Diocese are Mr. George Maybury, Blanchardstown, and Mr Garry Kehoe, Arklow. Garry and George were already 'Keeping Safe' trainers and have wide experience in delivering training throughout the Diocese.

We continue to offer parish information sessions and are available to meet with any parish or other groups to discuss any issue in relation to Child Safeguarding and Protection. Please feel free to call the CSPA 01 8360314 for further information.