



NEWSLETTER

SAFEGUARDING IN YOUTH MINISTRY



Kirsten Mahon, Gerard Hanley, Siobhan Tighe and Cilla Farrell (pictured above) make up the youth ministry team based at St Paul's Church on Arran Quay. They work with teenagers and young adults to provide opportunities for them to explore, express and share their faith. The majority of those they work with are minors (under 18 years old) so safeguarding is a key concern for the team. Their approach to safeguarding was examined by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI), as part of their review of the Archdiocese of Dublin (see below) and it was found to be good. In a recent conversation with Andrew Fagan of CSPS, they described their approach to safeguarding.

Siobhan described safeguarding policies and practices, and having access to CSPS for advice and support, as providing a degree of security to the team when it comes to dealing with young people. Siobhan spoke about the importance for her of doing things correctly and how this is understood and viewed positively by the parents of the young people with whom they work. Even those parents who may not have a particular

wish for their children to be involved in Church related activity respond positively when they learn of the seriousness and professionalism that mark the approach to safeguarding. Kirsten offered the example of a young person who turned up at a retreat without parental consent. Rather than turn him away, Kirsten contacted his father who was surprised that his son had decided to attend such an event but was happy to learn that someone was concerned for his son's welfare and respectful of his wishes for his son. He consented to his son's attendance at the retreat.

Andrew asked whether compliance with safeguarding practice takes some of the spontaneity and fun out of engaging with young people. Siobhan said that making proper arrangements, such as ensuring that there are enough people to provide adequate supervision of events and activities, getting them all vetted and so on, can be onerous. However, it is no more so than other necessary arrangements like making sure that the premises are adequate and suitable. Once all the arrangements are in place, the fun and spontaneity follow. The analogy of the presence of the Gardai in a neighbourhood was offered. Knowing that they are there gives people the freedom and confidence to go about their business, knowing that they are safe.

Asked whether safeguarding has a negative impact on interacting with young people, Gerard said that youth ministry is relational. It is by building relationships with young people that they are enabled to explore their faith. Boundaries are important and good boundaries support relationship building. We explored the area of physical contact. Siobhan said that some young people seek it and that it is important to respond, rather than to reject them. However, she does not seek out such contact. Gerard said that he 'High Fives' with young people and engages in fist to fist contact. These practices are part of youth culture.

Consent, it was agreed, is key. Cilla, drawing on her experience of engaging with young people in a different context, pointed out that we can only engage with minors with the consent of their parents. However, gaining the consent of young people themselves is an important part of good safeguarding practice with children of all ages. This is not a form filling exercise but, as Siobhan pointed out, ensuring that explanations are given so that the young people understand what is happening and can participate willingly.

The guideline about not being alone with a young person can be applied without losing opportunities to talk privately, where appropriate, provided this is done where others can observe.

It is not always possible to identify, through the selection process, staff and volunteers with a good

sense of professional and personal boundaries and Cilla spoke about the need to identify and deal with poor practice when it arises. This is a considerable challenge: finding ways to address poor practice that are respectful and sensitive to those whose practice falls below the expected standard. However difficult, it is how we protect children. It also protective of people whose practice is poor as lack of respect for appropriate boundaries can deteriorate into practices that may be experienced as abusive.

The youth ministry team in St Paul's understand that safeguarding is about demonstrating respect for children and young people by our actions. The policies and procedures guide our actions and give us the security of knowing what is expected of us. Safeguarding is not separate from, or additional to, good pastoral practice. It is integral to it.

NATIONAL BOARD REVIEW

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland ('the National Board') carried out a review of child safeguarding and protection practice in the Archdiocese of Dublin in late 2019. The report of this review will be completed shortly and it will be published on the diocesan website. The purpose of the review was to measure compliance with the seven safeguarding standards of *Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. The reviewers found the Archdiocese of Dublin to be compliant with the seven safeguarding standards.

The National Board carried out a review in 2014 and made some recommendations for improvements in practice. These recommendations were implemented and, since the Diocese was found to be compliant with the seven standards this time, no new recommendations are being made. In 2014 the emphasis was very much on how the Diocese had dealt with allegations and complaints of child abuse by clerics of the Diocese. The scope of the 2019 review was broader. The handling of cases since the last review was examined and, in addition, the reviewers looked at safeguarding practices in the parishes. They visited three parishes and met with children, parents and those running children's activities in the parishes. They found safeguarding practice to be very good.



Commenting on the findings, Archbishop Martin expressed satisfaction with them. He paid particular tribute to those working in the parishes, who give of their time freely and generously to ensure that children and young people are welcomed, nurtured and protected from harm in the parishes of Dublin.

VETTING UPDATE

Many of our 'customers' have commented recently on the improvement in the vetting service. Vetting applications are now being processed much more quickly than in the past, usually within a few days.

After the vetting legislation came into effect in 2016, the number of vetting applications processed by the diocesan vetting office almost trebled. The vetting office was overwhelmed with the extra work and this was exacerbated by the requirement to have 10,000 volunteers vetted for the World Meeting of Families. 30,000 vetting applications were processed in 2018. The figure for 2019 was just under 20,000.

For much of the period since 2016, the vetting office was carrying a substantial backlog of applications. In June 2019, this backlog was finally eliminated. Now any application received will be immediately entered on the National Vetting Bureau (NVB) portal by the staff of the vetting office. These applications are returned by NVB sometimes within a matter of hours.

The improvement in the vetting service has come about because the changes brought about by the legislation and the introduction of e-vetting have bedded in and we are all more familiar and comfortable with the new system. Vivienne Knight, who coordinates the service, has put good systems in place for processing applications and these have improved the efficiency of the service. Vivienne and her team, Clare Harwood and Matilda Chongwa, are to be congratulated on a job well done.

STOP IT NOW!

Help for those who fear they could abuse children

There is a lot of misinformation about the sexual abuse of children. A paedophile is not, as the 'Red Tops' would have us believe, an abuser of children. A paedophile is someone who is sexually attracted to children. There is a world of difference between having feelings and acting on those feelings.

Paedophiles are not all abusers of children and not all abusers of children are paedophiles. If we want to prevent the sexual abuse of children we need to find ways to reach out to those who are sexually attracted to children to help them manage those feelings in ways that do not harm children. Precisely because the sexual abuse of children is so abhorrent, it is extremely difficult for those troubled with a sexual attraction to children to seek help.

Stop it Now! is a project of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a UK based charity dedicated to tackling the sexual abuse of children. On their website www.stopitnow.ork.uk they have a range of resources providing information and advice to those who might be worried about themselves or about members of their family or friends. There is a confidential helpline available to people in Ireland. It is: 0808 1000900.



VULNERABLE ADULT SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

The diocesan vulnerable adult safeguarding policy was published in July 2019 and is available on the CSPA website: www.cspa.dublindiocese.ie. Training in vulnerable adult safeguarding is currently being developed and will be provided later this year.

We are very conscious of the demands made of those who work in our parishes and we want to provide training that minimises any extra demands on this time. To this end, we are working on an information session that provides information and advice on safeguarding of both children and vulnerable adults.

Good safeguarding practice applies equally to dealing with children and vulnerable adults. It includes such things as safe recruitment practices (including vetting) and following an agreed code of practice. However,

there are differences when it comes to considering types of abuse and the reporting of abuse. For example, financial abuse is a very significant issue for vulnerable adults but not for children. We have well defined, and legally sanctioned, procedures for reporting child abuse but not for reporting the abuse of vulnerable persons. The challenge of designing an information session that deals with both is how to deal with the differences without causing confusion.

Further information on this issue will be available later this year.