

Good afternoon everyone. It is said every long journey begins with a single step, just like every mighty oak started as a small acorn, it is my hope today that this conference will help people from across the world to take small steps and to learn from each other how to best safeguard children especially those involved in Church activities.

ACORN

The acorn has long been the symbol for our congregation, the presentation sisters so it is important in the context of who I am, that this is our starting point.

PRESENTATION SISTER

From my earliest days, even as a school girl the symbol, acorn to oak was known to me as it referred to the fact that our foundress Venerable Nano Nagle founded her congregation in Cork in 1775 and when she died there were just five sisters. Presentation Sisters are now in every continent of the world and we were quite a big congregation. Now we are an aged group and we have few new members so the new oak from another acorn has yet to emerge.

CHILD PROTECTION IN THE CHURCH

I began working in Child Protection (as it was called) in the Catholic Church in March 1995. I was asked by the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) to set up an office. At that time the executive of CORI thought the office might be needed for a year or two at the most....how wrong we were.

FAMILY THERAPY BACKGROUND

I had been a teacher for some years before working in a Retreat Centre. I was also chair for several years of a Board of Management of a large Secondary School. During my time in that role I became aware of the rise in suicide and attempted suicide among many young students. I noted that the parents and families got very little help in dealing with these tragedies so I decided to study Marriage and Family therapy so that I could be available to help if it was requested. For that purpose I did a Masters Programme in the USA. Using this experience when I returned to Ireland I did some family therapy in a poor socio economic area of north inner city Dublin and in that work I became more and

more aware of the issue of child sex abuse in society. At that time (1995) many were in denial about the extent of child sexual abuse especially among clergy, religious and pastoral workers. There was a resistance towards 'ownership' of the awfulness of the fact that abuse happened in the Catholic Church in Ireland. There were whispers of a media campaign against the Church, that people were only looking for money and many other denial clichés were used to protect us from the pain of taking on board the full impact of what was emerging. I worked in CORI for a number of years and it was during this time that the extent and awfulness of the knowledge of abuse of children by clergy and religious in Ireland was reaching it's peak.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Due to this personal and professional experience after I left CORI a Bishop asked me to 'walk with the priests of his Diocese who were out of ministry because of child sexual abuse allegations'. What exactly he meant by my role in 'walking this journey with the priests' caused a lot of confusion between the Bishop, myself and the men themselves.

WHAT I OFFERED

In terms of what I offered, initially I was seeing 7 Priests from one Diocese and 3 from another, over several years. I saw them once a month for an hour and I offered them a space to talk. So although my experience is from a tiny acorn of 10 men, I learned so much from them over those years, and the rest of my presentation will focus on my thoughts and reflections about this experience.

As I said in terms of what my role was, the lack of clear boundaries with my initial brief as understood by the Bishop, myself and the men I was working with caused some confusion. And each of us assumed the role was different things, and 'we all know what ASSUME does it makes and ASS out of U and Me'.

INFORMAL MONITORING

The Bishop was afraid that these men might continue to harm children and he was adamant that he would do everything in his power to prevent this happening. And he thought if I were seeing them regularly I would notice changes in them, and that I would from self report about their lifestyle, their

coping ability, their health and their spiritual life I would be able to note any concerns and that if I had any concerns I would report this to the Bishop. In this way the role was one of informal monitoring. The Bishop, initially saw it as formal monitoring.

COMPANIONSHIP

In contrast to the Bishop, I myself saw the role as one of companionship for the men. From my own personal and professional experience that I mentioned previously it was important to put boundaries around this relationship and to address the limits to confidentiality. In fact at the first session I asked each of the men to sign a statement of agreement outlining the four areas which limited the otherwise confidential content of our sessions. These areas were:

- Homicidal
- Suicidal
- Child protection concerns
- Supervision

Alongside this agreement I made it very clear to each man that I was not his therapist or his spiritual director but would be there for him especially in times of crisis e.g. sickness, court cases etc.

WHAT THEY GOT FROM ME

So having covered what the Bishop saw my role as and what I saw my role as I want to talk a bit about what the priests gained from my involvement. Initially they saw 'having to come to meet me' as a punishment, and part of the risk management plan the Bishop was imposing.

LISTENING EAR

What they got from me was a listening ear. At the beginning of our meetings they mostly complained about how harshly they were being treated by the Church, I used to try and counterbalance this by showing them that they were the ones who had created the situation by their behaviour and in fact their Bishop was treating them fairly. The Bishop used to show me letters which he was proposing to send to the men. In my opinion these letters were fair and pastoral, but the men themselves would see it in a totally different light.

ESCAPE FROM ISOLATION

Each of these men was very isolated, even their own families had rejected them and the priests of the Diocese found it difficult to visit or contact them by phone. There were probably many reasons for this some of which Hans spoke about on Tuesday, but the priests of the diocese felt at risk of manipulation from the men out of ministry. I will give you an instance that I found extremely sad- I always telephoned all of the men on Christmas Day and one year I called a man at 7pm and asked him what his day had been like. He told me he had gone to Mass on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day he made a traditional Irish Christmas dinner for himself (ham, turkey etc). In the afternoon he went for a stroll on a nearby beach but felt he had to come back as the beach was full of families and he was not to be 'alone' with them. I asked him if he had any visits or phone calls and he told me I was the only one he had spoken to that day.

EASEMENT OF MENTAL STRESS

As you can imagine the mental stress experienced by these men was great. I was conscious of the impact that could have on their physical and mental health. To illustrate this point I want to give you a short story about an experience that was related to me by a lay person who is responsible for safeguarding in a Diocese. When he outlined the allegation to a priest who had been accused, the man listened to everything that was said but denied that the alleged behaviour took place, outwardly he seemed calm and listened to all that was said, and in fact told the person putting the allegation to him, that he understood it was part of his job and he calmly got up and left the room. The lay person heard a thud and ran to find the priest dead at the door. Apart from the shock that this story shows, I was very conscious of the risk of suicide among these men. Several priests and religious have died by suicide after an allegation has been made against them. I heard a story directly from another designated person for safeguarding who called a brother in a religious house to make an appointment for him for the following day at 10 am. The Designated person didn't tell the man what the appointment was for, but when he arrived at the house the next morning he saw the ambulance was already there and the man was being taken away. He had overdosed and was found unconscious that morning, he died the next day.

WHAT I LEARNED

We are now at the third branch of the tree of experience and I wanted to use this time to illustrate common patterns and themes that have emerged from working with these 10 men and others that I have come to hear about in my personal and professional life. I have grouped these experiences into 5 branches. Let's look at the first one

I WAS SEEN AS PUNISHMENT

The men saw me initially as a punishment and resented having to come to me and were often contemptuous and angry with me. They saw my involvement as part of an unjust system. One said to me once 'the Church are using you, to make themselves look good. They don't really care about me or for me'. This anger and resentment was common amongst 9 out of the 10 men I was working with. This attitude is totally at odds with the views expressed by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin about the importance of support for everyone involved.

MANIPULATION OF CHURCH TEACHING AND ME

The use of manipulation by these men was masterful and as I mentioned previously was part of the reason that their fellow priests found it difficult to even visit them. To me this manipulation seemed to exist at two levels: theologically we are part of the Church of Jesus Christ who loved sinners, and we are a sinful Church which should be warm and welcoming even towards the greatest of sinners, this argument was one of those debated by Hans Zollner on Tuesday. The men I worked with used this theological debate as a reason why they shouldn't be taken from ministry.

Manipulation also existed very obviously at a personal level between myself and the men I worked with. I thought I couldn't be manipulated but I was, in very subtle ways. To illustrate this point I want to tell you two of my experiences. The first was when I visited a priest who was physically disabled and restricted in his mobility. He suggested that the time he spent with me this month would include lunch in a restaurant. I didn't know the area but I thought we would go to a nearby quiet restaurant and talk, and as we got into the car to drive he gave me directions and we arrived at a very busy restaurant

on the edge of the town where he had ministered for most of his priestly life. As we entered the restaurant he began going round different tables greeting people, while I sat at a table waiting for him. I felt totally caught, used and manipulated.

My second story involves a priest who was pleading extreme poverty. He asked me if I could get money to pay for his health insurance or oil for his heating, which amounted to 500 euro. I told him that I wasn't able to give him money but that if he liked it I would feedback his concerns to the Bishop. Even though this Priest knew the boundaries of our relationship he felt he could push those boundaries to make me feel sorry enough for him, to give him money.

FELT UNFAIRLY TREATED

I have touched on this point earlier, but in my experience all except one of the men I worked with, believed that they were unfairly treated by the Church. For instance one man couldn't understand why he was removed from ministry, he had run a very good parish, he setup many projects for the elderly in his parish and was very good to the sick. The parishioners considered him a saint as he was always seen praying at the Church. He felt unjustly treated by the Church as he was removed from ministry because in his eyes 'he had never done any wrong in his own parish...he only abused outside.' This man was an opportunistic abuser, a masterful manipulator and a very dangerous man. He used to travel across Ireland to access individual young men in parks, swimming pools, cinemas and other public places, far distant from his own Diocese.

NARCISSISM

Of the 10 men I regularly met, 7 were extreme narcissists. The whole world revolved around them and their needs. One in particular if I were ever to teach narcissism I would use him as a primary example. One day on the way to my regular monthly meeting with this priest, I had picked up a National Newspaper and in the most prominent position on the front page was an a4 sized picture of the man I was going to meet. The story was not about him, but his picture was there to illustrate what serial abusers look like. I always brought a paper with me when I went to see these men, to do the crossword in

between our meetings. I thought that he would be very upset when he saw the paper, and I was very worried about how to broach the subject with him. I casually asked him if he had read the paper today, when he said he hadn't I told him that his photo was on the front page and he wanted to see it. When he stared at the picture his response was 'they didn't even give me time to straighten my cap'. He was actually delighted that he was on the front page of the paper and the attention, even negative attention, fed into his narcissism.

DENIAL ABOUT THE IMPACT

All of these men were in denial. Some about having abused at all, but all were in complete denial about the impact of their abuse on their victims. One man who was a convicted sex abuser said 'he himself had been abused, but it hadn't done him any harm'. He also claimed that 'he only did what the boys he abused gave him permission to do, so if the boys were alright about it, it was ok.' As a principal of a school he was in total denial about the power he held over his victims and the fact that the boys were unable to give or withdraw consent.

NOT JUST BLUE SKY THINKING

The reason I'm here today speaking about how my experience of working with respondents has grown, is not to provide the answers, but to give you some of my own reflections on the issues that emerged for me. The great benefit of this Anglophone conference is that it isn't a talking shop or blue sky thinking but that it is a place where we learn from each other so that we are aware of the mistakes and the challenges that we've each overcome in our efforts to safeguard children. With that in mind I want to highlight a few of the lessons I have learned.

RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED OVER TIME

As a therapist I was trained to acknowledge my own prejudices and how these could affect my practice. At the beginning I really disliked and was angry with the men because of what they have done, but I believed that by being there for them I was helping to safeguard children. I moved from that anger and dislike to 'pitying' them, which as a Presentation Sister and member of our Church I found an awful way to be. I hated it, in fact I preferred disliking them

to pitying them. From there I moved to an empathy with them, I got to like them, to the point that if I saw an indication of change in attitude I was greatly cheered. When I found them regressing I was angry with them and told them so. On reflection I think it's important to recognise, know and name the emotions that this role brought me through, to enable me to regulate myself as Melissa said, I needed two things boundaries and supervision.

BOUNDARIES

Making and maintaining boundaries was important for me. I never saw any of the men I worked with in my own home, even though one man who lived near me suggested it often. One Diocese hired a room for use to meet the men, the other three from a different Diocese I met in hotel lobbies. Anyone looking for a quiet place for a private chat, come and see me.

Because of the confusion around my role I mentioned earlier, keeping boundaries was even more important. I was not a therapist, spiritual director or friend. I think on reflection and looking back on this role, it could be summarised as an *anam cara* which is Irish for Soul Friend. I was there for them in my role and only in that role.

SUPERVISION

Closely linked with boundaries, positive professional relationship and acknowledging my own personal feelings and prejudice, I needed good supervision and support. For every seven hours of work with the men I had two hours of formal supervision which was paid for by the Diocese. I insisted at the outset that this was part of my agreement with both Dioceses. Supervision was vital to this role to help me maintain objectivity. Grappling with the distressing facts of what these men had done, alongside the minimisation and denial they asserted was a difficult task and one which I wanted to protect my soul, heart and mind from being sullied from. My supervisor would question how and why I responded to certain situations and would offer alternative perspectives on how I could respond if a similar scenario came up at other times. This challenged me to see things in a more objective, non-judgemental way and encouraged me to overcome my original prejudices and biases.

DIFFICULT TO MEASURE

This work by its nature was and is difficult for me to measure how effective my intervention was in the lives of these men and work of safeguarding in the Church. The original confusion about the role being either a companion or an informal monitor, gave way to it becoming a combination of both. The men had a safe place to explore their own feelings within the bounds of confidentiality whilst also the informal monitoring side of my role allowed me to identify red flags in lifestyle changes. To help illustrate this point I'll tell you two stories. The first one was a conversation I had with one of the men, who told me he regularly visited a sandpit near his home. I wondered what the attraction of the sandpit was for him and I asked him, why he went there. He told me 'a lot of young children play there'. What he said was an immediate red flag for me, and I told him that I would be reporting his behaviour to the Bishop. Before I had the chance to report it, the next day the Bishop telephoned me to say that he had received a complaint from a parent that this man was 'hanging out at the sandpit', I confirmed to the Bishop the information the priest had passed to me which verified the story. The consequence of this was that he was banned from going near the sandpit as part of his risk management plan.

The second story I want to relate is about one of the men who had a drink problem, but had told his Bishop and me that he hadn't taken any alcoholic drink for a number of years. He came to one of our monthly meetings and I could smell alcohol on his breath. In a tone of denial and manipulation he told me I was imagining it, and I said that this again was a red flag and that I was under an obligation to report this to the Bishop. Unfortunately the Priest went missing and the state authorities or the Diocese couldn't find him.

IMPORTANCE OF ROLE

Using both these stories, although the role is difficult to measure in terms of its success in the wider Church context of safeguarding children, if I hadn't have been in this role these key pieces of information mentioned in these two

stories and many others may not have been identified. The role despite its confusion was an effort to be pastorally available to these men, being a Church community we must be caring in a responses, especially to these people who are amongst the most despised in society today.

WHOLE PICTURE

I began with the image of the acorn becoming the oak, each of us here today have taken little steps in making our Church a place where children are loved, cared for nurtured and are safe. I believe we need to continue to learn from each other especially those affected by child abuse, the people who were abused, their families. The people who abused and their families, the people in parishes and communities where abuse was perpetuated and professionals working in this field across the world. Each one of us in our knowledge and experience are vital to helping overcome and understand child abuse. As Mother Teresa put it, each of us are one drop, but the ocean would less without that one drop.