



**Review of Child Safeguarding Practice  
in the Cistercian Order of**

**The Cistercian Sisters, St Mary's Abbey,  
Glencairn**

**undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)**

**Date March 2015**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) was asked by the Sponsoring Bodies, namely the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union, to undertake a comprehensive review of safeguarding practice within and across all the Church authorities on the island of Ireland.

The NBSCCCI is aware that some religious congregations have ministries that involve direct contact with children while others do not. In religious congregations that have direct involvement with children, reviews of child safeguarding have been undertaken by measuring their practice compliance against all seven Church standards. Where a religious congregation no longer has, or never had ministry involving children and has not received any allegation of sexual abuse, the NBSCCCI reviews are conducted using a shorter procedure. The size, age and activity profiles of religious congregations can vary significantly and the NBSCCCI accepts that it is rational that the form of review be tailored to the profile of each Church authority, where the ministry with children is limited or non-existent. The procedure for assessment of safeguarding practice with such congregations is set out in the contents page of this report. The NBSCCCI welcomes that in order to have full openness, transparency and accountability, religious congregations that do not have ministry with children have made requests to have their safeguarding practice examined and commented upon.

The purpose of this review remains the same and it is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set down within the guidance issued by the Sponsoring Bodies in February 2009 *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and that all known allegations and concerns had been appropriately dealt with. To achieve this task, safeguarding practice in each of these Church Authorities is reviewed through an examination of policy and procedures, and through interviews with key personnel involved both within and external to the religious congregation.

This report contains the findings of the *Review of Safeguarding Practice within the Community of the Cistercian Sisters* undertaken by the NBSCCCI in line with the request made to it by the Sponsoring Bodies.

The findings of the review have been shared with a reference group before being submitted to the Abbess, Sr. Marie Fahy along with any recommendations arising from the findings. The review is not based on a review of case material as during the relevant time period, there were no allegations made against members of the Cistercian Community that were within the Terms of Reference. There also were no allegations in respect of other forms of abuse within the time period, in respect of deceased and living members of the community. The review therefore is primarily based on policies and procedures made available plus interviews with key personnel involved in the safeguarding process within the community, particularly in the services run by the community.

## **1. Introduction**

The Cistercian Order arose as a reform movement within the Benedictine tradition in the 12th century. The first Cistercian monastery was established in Citeaux, France in 1098 by Saints Robert, Alberic and Stephen.

Early in the Cistercian tradition, women sought the Cistercian way of life and the first Cistercian monastery for women was in Tart, France, a daughter house of Citeaux, founded by St. Stephen in 1125.

St. Malachy brought the Cistercians to Ireland in 1142, to Mellifont, County Louth. St Mary's Abbey, Glencairn is the first Cistercian monastery for women in Ireland since the Reformation, founded in 1932 by Holy Cross Abbey, Stapehill, England. St Mary's Abbey Glencairn is a monastic community of women belonging to the Cistercian Order within the Roman Catholic Church. They live a life of worship of God in community, expressed in prayer, lectio divina, work and service of one another. They share their lives with others through their liturgy, and hospitality. In their safeguarding policy document, they state *As nuns consecrated to God by monastic vows in the Gospel tradition that is expressed in the Rule of St. Benedict and their Constitutions, we try to live a life that honours and respects all people, especially the most vulnerable. For this reason sexual misconduct by a member of the monastic community with a vulnerable person is especially reprehensible and totally unacceptable in terms of our monastic profession.*

Today, there are 31 community members in the community of St Mary's Abbey, Glencairn. In addition to the Abbey there is a guest house on the abbey grounds for adults who may wish to make a personal retreat. This facility is not open to unaccompanied children.

## **2. Role Profile (past and present role with children):**

The Cistercian Sisters live a monastic way of life, which restricts their access to members of the public and in particular to children. Their ministry is through prayer and a monastic way of life which separates them from the distractions of regular society, which enables an atmosphere more conducive to prayer and consciousness of God.

Their traditional occupation is the management of a large 200 acre farm at St Mary's Abbey, 40 acres of which is woodland. They specialise in dry stock and tillage farming, wheat, barley, potato and fodder beet are amongst the crops usually grown.

The Sisters also design and produce cards for all occasions in both Irish and English in Glencairn.

While the Sisters have no direct public ministry with children, some of the services they provide within the confines of the Abbey mean that they do come into contact with children. For the most part children visiting the Abbey will be in the company of their parents and would not be left unattended.

In addition to the two occupations above, the Sisters also produce altar breads as another means by which they support their life of prayer. They distribute their Bread products to parishes, monasteries, convents and other institutions throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom.

## **Review of Child Safeguarding Practice in the Cistercian Order of The Cistercian Sisters**

A small number of school groups visit the Abbey as part of their preparation for First Holy Communion. This visit takes the form of a one hour guided tour with a visit to the chapel included. At all times the children are supervised by their school teachers and one or two of the children's parents and the Cistercian Sisters have no unsupervised access to the children.

### **3. Profile of Members:**

There are 31 Sisters living in St Mary's Abbey in Glencairn. They range in age between 40 and 91. There are 6 Sisters in their 40s, 4 in their 50s, 8 in their 60s, with the remainder being over 70. There is one Sister in her 90s. The average age of the Sisters is 65. Currently there is building work going on in the Abbey and therefore 4 elderly Sisters are being cared for off-site in a nursing home.

Monastic life requires that all Sisters remained involved in the running of the Abbey, cooking, cleaning and general administration. Others minister through their spirituality whereby seven times a day they meet in the church to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours, consisting of psalms, scripture readings and prayers. Other Sisters work on the farm or in the Eucharist centre making bread, or in the card making centre.

### **4. Policy and Procedures Document:**

The Cistercian Sisters have a short policy document which makes explicit their commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable people. It sets out their reporting procedure, response to and care of complainants and management of the accused. The document also references their requirement to prevent abuse and finally their willingness to co-operate with the local diocesan procedures. The document is adequate for the level of ministry that they have with children.

### **5. Structures:**

There is a designated person in place and an Abbess, who take responsibility for ensuring that there is a child safeguarding policy in place and that allegations, if they emerge will be processed through the civil authorities. Given that this is a monastic community with very limited contact with children, the NBSCCCI is satisfied that this structure is proportionate.

### **6. Management of Allegations and liaison with the statutory authorities:**

There have not been any allegations against any Cistercian Sister. The Community have therefore not had any reason to engage with either TUSLA or the Gardai. There is a designated person in place in the event that an allegation is made and this person is very familiar with the reporting requirements.

### **7. Conclusion:**

The Cistercian Sisters lead a life devoted to prayer. While the grounds and the altar bread making facilities allow for visiting children, these children are there as part of their preparations in school for First Holy Communion, at all times they remain the responsibility of the school and are under the supervision of the teacher who accompanies them. The reviewer is satisfied that adequate measures are in place to safeguard children while visiting the Abbey. There are no safeguarding concerns about any member of the community.

**Review of Child Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland**  
**Terms of Reference**  
**Small Religious Congregations**  
**(which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Notes)**

**Introduction**

In order for the NBSCCCI to be able to state that all Church Authorities on the island of Ireland have been evaluated in respect of their child safeguarding policies and practices, both historical and current, then some form of appropriate assessment has to be conducted of every one of these. It is rational however that the form of assessment is tailored to the profile of each Church Authority, and that needless expenditure of resources and unnecessary interference in the life of religious orders and communities that have no children-specific ministry would be avoided.

This review seeks to examine the current arrangements for safeguarding children across small religious congregations /orders, and missionary societies in Ireland who have limited or no direct contact with children as part of the congregation's ministry.

It would also scrutinize practice within all known cases to ensure that they have been responded to appropriately.

The review's methodology is an adaptation of the methodology developed for all dioceses and large religious congregations and missionary societies, where the ministry involves regular contact with children.

The proposed review would consider the following:-

- (a) Former role with children
- (b) Allegations of child abuse against members and how these have been responded to
- (c) Existing relationships with statutory authorities such as the HSE, Gardai in the Republic and the HSCT or PSNI in Northern Ireland.
- (d) Policies in place and being applied for safeguarding children
- (e) Roles and responsibilities and where they exist the operation of Advisory Panels, and Safeguarding Committees

The objective of the review would be to confirm if there have been any allegations and how known allegations have been responded to; in addition the review seeks to confirm what the current arrangements for safeguarding children are. In particular, emphasis will be placed on establishing how policies and practice match up to the standards set down in *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland and launched in February 2009. Priority, at all times, will be given to how policy and practice can be improved and strengthened. If policies and/or practices are identified that are concerning, inadequate, or dangerous, they will be addressed through the provision of guidance and support, and through the reporting of these situations to the appropriate statutory authorities, if this has not already happened. Similarly, those that are good examples will be highlighted with a view to them being adopted comprehensively across all parts of the Church. All cases that relate to alleged or known offenders that are alive will be read and included in the review. In cases where the alleged or known offender is deceased, these will be sampled in an attempt to gather learning from them that will be used to inform the framing of recommendations.

### **Guidance Documents**

The review will be guided by the following:-

- (a) *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*
- (b) *Children First* Guidance in ROI; and Regional Child Protection Guidelines in Northern Ireland;
- (c) Legislation that exists in each jurisdiction which contributes to safeguarding children and young people.

The review will be undertaken by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) through their National Office and led by the Chief Executive Officer.

The review process will be overseen by a Reference Group to whom the CEO will report on a regular basis. The membership of this Reference Group has been drawn from each of the statutory child protection agencies in both jurisdictions, along with eminent individuals in the field from academia. The current Reference Group consists of: Dr Helen Buckley (TCD); Mr Paul Harrison (Tusla), and John Toner (SBNI).

It is important to confirm that the value of the review is dependent upon full and complete access to all relevant documentation and information relating to the abuse of children known to the individual Church authorities. The review will proceed on the basis that willingness exists on the part of each of the subjects of the review to provide full access to the fieldwork team, subject, where relevant, to the terms of the Data Processing Deed agreed between the Sponsoring Bodies and entered into between the parties hereto.

**Step Guide to the Review Process**

**Step 1.**

A letter of invitation to review is sent by the Provincial/Regional Superior or other person responsible for the congregation/ order or missionary society (hereinafter referred to as 'the Ordinary').

**Step 2.**

The CEO will forward a survey to the provincial which will identify:

- Current number of members
- Past role with children
- Current role with children
- Total number of allegations received up to 2014
- Number of living members against whom there are allegations

**Step 3.**

For any Order where there have been allegations a full review will proceed, as per step 4 - 23. For those Orders where there have been no known allegations a desk top examination of policies and procedures will take place followed by a site visit to interview all relevant personnel within the safeguarding structure. For these orders step 5 and 13-23 will apply.

**Step 4.**

The CEO and Ordinary will confirm the dates for the fieldwork for the review, and names of the fieldwork team.

**Step 5.**

The Church Authority will be asked to make available all of the case files and related documentation in respect of any safeguarding concerns that have been identified within the diocese. The Church Authority will make available a room with wireless internet access for the reviewers to conduct their review of files, so that any records made by the reviewers can be directly typed and stored onto a secure server which is only accessed by the reviewers. In the absence of internet access the reviewers will type their notes onto a secure encrypted USB stick for later uploading onto the secure server.

**Step 6.**

The Church Authority will be requested to sign the revised Data Processing Deed prior to the arrival of the team.



**Step 7.**

The Church Authority will arrange a schedule of interviews with all who hold safeguarding roles within its functional area. The designated person and the Church Authority will be available to the reviewers throughout the period of fieldwork.

**Step 8.**

The fieldwork team when they arrive on site will firstly confirm that they have a suitable place to work in and that all the required documentation has been provided to them for their review. In the event that the fieldwork team forms the opinion that the Church Authority has not provided access to all such documents, the NBSCCCI shall give notice in writing to the Church Authority of the opinion of the fieldwork team and such notice shall specify the reasons for same. Thereupon, the Church Authority shall respond in detail to the notice. Each party shall use its best endeavours to resolve any differences of opinion which shall arise and, in the event that resolution is not arrived at, the parties will attempt to resolve the dispute by recourse to the services of a mediator agreed between them or nominated for the purpose at the request of any of them without prejudice to the NBSCCCI's entitlement to terminate the review. In the event that resolution has not been arrived at following mediation, either party shall be at liberty to terminate forthwith the review.

**Step 9.**

On arrival, the fieldwork team should be supplied with a single case file index that lists all the cases that have been created within the diocese. These may be divided into two groups. The first group will contain all allegations that relate to living alleged or known perpetrators. The second will contain any that are deceased.

**Step 10.**

Depending on the volume involved a decision should be made as to whether all or a random sample of the "deceased group" should be reviewed. Care should be taken to include all prominent cases in the sample.

**Step 11.**

Each case file will be reviewed by each fieldworker independently in the first instance. They will create a written summary with chronological information of the case. In certain cases a second reader may be required, this will be discussed and agreed between the fieldworkers.

**Step 12.**

Following the reading of the case and the creation of a summary, the fieldworkers will analyse and assess the actions taken in the case. They will assess compliance with agreed Church policy that was extant at that time. They will also indicate whether any current risk exists in respect of the information contained within the file and advise the church Authority of necessary safeguarding action to reduce the risk.

**Step 13.**

When all the case files have been read, the fieldwork team will then examine and review any procedures or protocols that exist within the diocese to confirm that they are in compliance with the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance* document issued by the NBSCCCI in February of 2009.

**Step 14.**

To complete the review, the fieldwork team will then seek to speak to those directly involved in the safeguarding structure in the diocese. This should include the Advisory Panel, a sample of parish safeguarding representatives, the designated person, the safeguarding committee, victim support and advisors and the Bishop/Provincial. The purpose of these interviews is to form a view of the competence and effectiveness of the safeguarding structure that exists within the Church Authority.

**Step 15.**

The fieldwork team will also seek to speak to representatives of the key statutory agencies to provide them with an opportunity to express their views on the quality of the working relationships that exist between them and the Church Authority.

**Step 16.**

A verbal feedback session on initial key findings will be given to the Church Authority.

**Step 17.**

Upon completion of the field work, the team may request to take materials – other than casework records to review off-site; this alongside all materials gathered by the reviewers, including written notes on cases and meetings, will be analysed and will form the basis of the draft assessment review report.

**Step 18.**

The draft will be forwarded to the Church Authority for factual accuracy checking.

**Step 19.**

Alongside all other reports under review, the report will be presented in draft to the Reference Group for their critique and comment. If further work is required at the direction of the Reference group the CEO will ensure this work is completed and advise the Church Authority accordingly.

**Step 20.**

The report will be legally proofed by NBSCCCI lawyer.

**Step 21.**

The report will be forwarded to the NBSCCCI for approval

**Step 22**

A final draft report will then be submitted to the Church Authority. The expectation would be that the report will be published by the Church Authority at an agreed time in the future.

**Step 23.**

All case material written, including summaries, as part of the review, which are for the reviewers use only, will be stored on a secure server.

**Guide for Reviewers**

In terms of small (female religious orders) reference should be made to the following:

1. Has the Order provided alternative care to children in an orphanage, industrial school or children's residential home, but no longer is engaged in running such services;
2. Has the order provided education to children, in both or either boarding schools and day schools, but no longer does so ;
3. Has the order provided medical and/or nursing services to children, but no longer does so;
4. Has the order provided any other services to children, in community services centres, youth clubs etc., and no longer does so;
5. Does the order currently provide any sort of service to children and families that brings them into regular contact with children;
6. Has the order never provided any service to children (e.g. contemplative orders).

In relation to category 1 above;

1. The reviewers will establish whether any service they provided is included in the list of children's residential services produced by the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB);
2. If this is the case, reference should be made to this.
3. If complaints have been referred to the Redress Board or Ryan Commission, this review cannot access these records and that will be stated in the report.
4. If the order has received complaints which have not been processed through Redress or Ryan these cases will be thoroughly examined as detailed above.

**Review of Policy and Procedures**

1. It is recognised that not all Orders will have any ministry with children and therefore their policies and procedures should reflect the work that they do with children.
2. If the Order only works through other organisations, example in Diocesan work or in schools, they are required to follow the policies of those organisations.
3. If there are gaps in the policy document an assessment should be made as to whether the ministry engaged in requires full compliance with all criteria attached to the seven standards
4. Where it is clear that the criteria do not apply a reference should be made at the beginning of the review report that the Order's ministry is not directly with children and therefore adherence to particular criteria do not apply.
5. If the Order is a contemplative Order, there is no expectation that they will have detailed policies and procedures, but reference should be made to their ministry and that they have no contact with children.
6. In all cases, contact will be made with the civil authorities to identify if they have any child safeguarding concerns in relation to the order.