



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice**  
**in the Diocese of Limerick**  
**undertaken by**

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

**Date of Review Report: April 2020**

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## Background

In 2016, Church authorities adopted *Safeguarding Children - Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland*. In order to assess compliance against the Church's standards, Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick invited the National Board to undertake a Review of practice in 2020. The diocese was previously reviewed in March 2012 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008*.

The purpose of this second round of Reviews is to assess the practice against the Catholic Church in Ireland's current standards, as detailed in *Safeguarding Children - Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016* and make statements based on evidence, which provide:

- Public confidence that the Church body is safe for children;
- Affirmation to Child Safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well;
- Confirmation to the Church authority that what they want to be done is in fact being done;
- Independent verification of Self-Audit – or correction and/or improvement of Self-Audit;
- Opportunities for learning.

The period covered by this Review is from March 2012 to March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020. This Review therefore has considered all cases reported to the diocese during this time period, in addition to cases still being managed at the time of this Review; and the safeguarding policies and practice currently operated within the diocese. Practice related to all the Standards is assessed from the date of the introduction of the revised National Standards in 2016.

The on-site fieldwork was carried out on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020 by three reviewers, and the following individuals and groups were either met or spoken with by telephone by the reviewers during this time, or in the days following:

- The Church authority, Bishop Brendan Leahy
- The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Director of Safeguarding
- Other members of the Limerick diocesan safeguarding service, including the Diocesan Secretary, the safeguarding administrators, the vetting liaison person, and the parish safeguarding support person
- Five safeguarding trainers registered with the National Board
- The Chairperson and 14 members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- 4 priest advisors
- The vicar for pastoral care
- A canon lawyer
- The Chairperson of the Advisory Panel
- Representatives of An Garda Síochána and of Tusla on the Inter-Agency Panel.
- Parish safeguarding representatives
- Priests
- Sacristans
- Three complainants
- The Training and Youth Ministry Coordinator
- Three members of the Communications Sub-Committee
- Youth leaders, teenagers, children and their parents

Other perspectives were gained from reading letters from complainants in response to diocesan website advertisement re: the safeguarding Review; responses to questionnaires sent by the Limerick Diocese to complainants and their families; and respondent priests' responses to questionnaires sent to them by the Limerick Diocese.

As part of this process, case management records were examined and any clarifications required were provided by the Director. In addition, all written and on-line safeguarding children material was reviewed.

The reviewers would like to express their thanks to Bishop Leahy, his safeguarding staff and volunteers and the priests and lay faithful of the Limerick Diocese for the invitation to conduct a Review and for their co-operation during this process.

## **Introduction**

The diocese of Limerick comprises the greater part of County Limerick, part of County Clare and one townland in County Kerry. Eighteen of its parishes are located in the Limerick metropolitan area and environs. Bishop Brendan Leahy has been the bishop of Limerick since 2013. The cathedral church of the diocese is St John's Cathedral.

According to the Limerick Diocesan website in March 2020:

- The overall population of the area covered by the diocese is 192,300, with a Catholic population of 184,340. The percentage Catholic population therefore is 95.86%.
- The diocese has 16 pastoral units, with 60 parishes and 94 churches, serviced by 61 parish clergy, 14 active retired priests and 5 assisting priests.
- There are 12 congregations of Religious Sisters, and 8 male Religious Orders based in the diocese; and several new ecclesial movements active in the global Catholic Church, described in more detail later.

### Previous Review

For continuity, reviewers looked at the 12 recommendations of the previous review of Limerick Diocese undertaken in March 2012, and note that these have all been addressed.

Please see *Response to NBSCCCI Audit Recommendations (1/10/13)* on the diocesan website *General News and Publications* page: [www.limerickdiocesefeguarding.com/news/general-news-publications/category/safeguarding-audit](http://www.limerickdiocesefeguarding.com/news/general-news-publications/category/safeguarding-audit)

## Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

### The Safeguarding Service, Personnel and Roles

The Limerick safeguarding service consists of the Director of Safeguarding/Designated Liaison Person, the Deputy Designated Liaison Person, two part-time safeguarding administrators, the vetting liaison person and the parish support person (part-time). In addition to this, the Diocesan Secretary/General Manager and the Vicar for Pastoral Care of Priests also have considerable involvement in various aspects of safeguarding.

There are **5** safeguarding trainers (one full-time), registered with the National Board, and **101** parish safeguarding representatives in place in the diocese. In addition, the diocese has four committees which provide advice and assistance to the Bishop of Limerick in the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children in the diocese. The four committees are:

- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee provides advice on the implementation of safeguarding policy. Members of the safeguarding committee with professional backgrounds take significant leadership roles in certain aspects of safeguarding, such as information, communications and vetting.
- The Case Management Advisory Committee provides advice on the management of child abuse allegations against Limerick diocesan priests.
- The Vetting Committee advises the diocesan vetting service on vetting policy, procedures and cases as per National Board guidance.
- The Policy and Governance Committee is the senior forum within the diocese which advises the Bishop on safeguarding in all church activities.

### Safe Recruitment

Evidence of good practice includes the *Diocese of Limerick: Safeguarding Children: Procedures for Garda Vetting* policy which can easily be accessed on the diocesan website. There is a three-year cycle for vetting in the diocese. Files created within parishes in respect of vetting prior to 2016 are now archived. An independently chaired vetting committee meets bi-monthly to address any vetting related issues and to update policy and procedures.

The diocese provides assistance in respect of Garda vetting, processing requests from its **60** parishes and from all non-teaching personnel in **104** schools. Monthly notifications in respect of incomplete vetting invitations are forwarded to each parish and school in the diocese. In May 2019, Chairpersons of Boards of Management of schools were requested to formally certify that vetting arrangements are in place in every school, to which there has been an 80% response rate to date.

The diocese recently began the process of transferring responsibility for vetting applications from priests in parishes to trained lay designated signatories. To date, **28** lay designated signatories have been appointed, with plans to appoint one in each parish in the diocese. Parishes submit hard copies of their vetting applications, which are processed using the diocesan database. This database was created in 2019 and is being populated retrospectively to flag repeat vetting requirements.

In relation to adverse disclosures, the applicant and their parish priest can meet with the Director of Safeguarding; and based on this interview a decision is made as to whether the person is suitable for

the role in question. If the applicant is unhappy with this decision, they have the right to appeal to the Diocesan Appeals Panel, who has the final say regarding the appeal.

The vetting figures for Limerick Diocese are outlined below:

#### **Vetting Figures for Limerick Dioceses from 2016 to date**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Schools: non-teaching staff</b>	<b>Total Figures</b>
2016	637	604	1,241
2017	735	825	1,569
2018	698	843	1,541
2019	627	765	1,392

The diocese advised that they have agreed an arrangement to work collaboratively with the Garda National Vetting Bureau to ensure a *best practice service* and to agree a list of roles to be vetted, going forward. The diocese is currently working on achieving shared vetting agreements with Religious congregations within the diocese, and to date, Bishop Leahy has signed a shared service level agreement with the Dominicans, Redemptorists and Franciscans.

#### Safe Care Practices, including Codes of Conduct

Reviewers had the opportunity to check the notices in the cathedral and church buildings in the 4 parishes that they visited. Discussions were held with the parish safeguarding representatives (PSRs) to establish that they had the requisite knowledge of the child safeguarding systems which must exist in their parishes. Based on these discussions, on evidence from parish visits, on interviews with members of the Safeguarding Committee and from sampling some parish self-audit returns, the reviewers are satisfied that the PSR system is operating effectively. Reviewers were assured that parish attendance registers are in place in all parishes in the diocese.

Safeguarding representatives described their perceptions of a shift in thinking about safeguarding, from one where it was seen as a worry and a hindrance in the parish, to where they believe it is now widely accepted as the norm, and as an essential component of youth ministry. Procedures are viewed as *very straightforward now*. One parish representative felt that when parents go through the whole vetting, recruitment and training process, they tend to become more committed volunteers.

The reviewers noted that the following safeguarding information documents were on display in all churches visited:

- *The Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy Statement.*
- *Safeguarding Information: for Children and Young People; for Parents/Guardians.*
- *Sacristy Safeguarding Protocol.*
- *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016.*
- Child Safeguarding information leaflets for parents and young people.

Reviewers suggest that the safeguarding information for children should be displayed at a level that they can read in all parishes of the diocese.

All adult volunteers applying for roles in Limerick Diocese must provide the contact details of two referees, and sign a Volunteer Application Form, which includes a Declaration of their suitability to work with children. Volunteers must also sign a Code of Behaviour for Adult Volunteers. This can be easily accessed on the diocesan website, or as Appendix 8, page 132 of the *Diocese of Limerick* –

*Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures* document. The Volunteer Application Form clearly sets out the expectations of adult behaviour when working with children and young people in the diocese. Parents/guardians and their children must sign a Parent/Guardian/Child Consent Form, outlining their contact details, any special needs/requirements of the child, and who to contact in the event of an emergency. Children must also sign a Code of Conduct in relation to their Church-based activities.

The reviewers had the pleasure of observing a children's choir and an altar server group respectively, in two separate parishes. Reviewers witnessed the practical engagement of leaders with the children in their care, in terms of risk assessment, rules and codes of behaviour. A sign-in register was in evidence in the two parishes. Reviewers also inspected the completed parental consent forms which were stored in secure locations in both parishes. The children themselves were happily engaged in fun, child-centred activities, where they were learning through the mediums of play and song. At all times the children were respectful of each other, their leaders and their surroundings. Reviewers noticed a *Creative Corner*, where colouring pencils and paper were left on a table for children to use; and their artwork was displayed on an adjacent wall. Leaders spoke of the inclusion of two new members with disabilities and of the learning involved for everyone. Issues that arise in the children's choir are dealt with by talking to the children and by giving them messages about inclusiveness through the choice of songs that they sing; and a similar approach is adopted when addressing safeguarding messages with the children.

Reviewers believe that the leaders were well informed about risk and hazard assessment for activities involving children and young people; on the avoidance of one-to-one contact with them; and on adult-to-children supervision ratios. Children spoken with were confident in outlining their knowledge of keeping themselves safe, about their feelings of being safe, and about what to do if they have worries or concerns. Reviewers inspected the standardised codes of conduct that the children had signed in relation to their parish activities. *The Diocese of Limerick – Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedure* (Appendix 21, p.145) includes the National Board Guidance – 1.3A: *Example Workshop on Creating a Code of Behaviour with Children*; and the reviewers would like to see this being used as an aid to actively involve children in designing their own child-friendly codes of behaviour for future use in their church activities.

### Support to Children and Young People

Having visited the ANOIS Leadership programme, and having interviewed trainers, leaders and participants in relation to ANOIS and the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage, reviewers are satisfied that teenagers involved are being properly inducted, trained and supported regarding safeguarding issues. The pastoral worker in charge of youth ministry and training has assured reviewers that safeguarding policy is being followed in relation to safeguarding training, risk assessment, vetting of volunteers, sign-in registers, codes of conduct and parental consent. The diocesan website includes a section on Youth Ministry which gives information to those wishing to run a youth ministry event. Reviewers would like to see more detailed information added to this section of the website in relation to *all* youth initiatives.

Diocesan analysis of the Parish Safeguarding Audits, 2018 highlighted the need for the preparation of a youth ministry handbook or guidance document to be circulated to all relevant stakeholders in the diocese; and the reviewers agree that this should be a priority. The *Diocese of Limerick Safeguarding Plan (2019 -2021)* highlights that the provision of customised information in the youth ministry area *will be a particular focus during the life-time of this three year plan.*

#### Use of Church property

Reviewers were assured by the Safeguarding Administrator that external groups must be insured and must sign to confirm that they have a safeguarding policy in place. The reviewers viewed the very clear guidelines in the policy document *Use of Church Property and Hire for Private Functions* (pages 55-58, *Limerick Diocesan Policy, 2017*) and on the homepage of the diocesan safeguarding website. The policy on use of Church property is included in safeguarding training for priests and safeguarding representatives. The parish safeguarding support worker outlined to reviewers how he discusses this issue with parishes and highlights the risk of liability to priests if they do not enforce the policy.

#### Hazard Assessment

Reviewers interviewed the organiser and leader of the ANOIS Leadership Programme and the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage and were shown examples of how hazard assessment is conducted in relation to these two programmes.

The ANOIS programme is based on Paulo Freire's *Training for Transformation* programme. It aims to foster leadership and encourages young people to achieve their full potential. Reviewers had the opportunity to visit an ANOIS programme in progress and to interview the leaders and participants. Reviewers noticed adult and child-friendly safeguarding policies clearly displayed both inside and outside the retreat centre being used. The students on the programme had been divided into groups of 8, with 3 leaders per group. Each group had created their own code of conduct and these were clearly displayed. There are three one-week residential ANOIS programmes held each year, and approximately 40 Transition Year students from 5 different schools in Limerick attend each week. The selection process for participants and leaders is strict. Adult-to-young person ratios are well within guidelines.

The diocese holds a list of **90** leaders who are Garda vetted. Leaders receive three days training, including two days safeguarding training, and have signed a GDPR form in relation to the confidentiality of student records. Parents/guardians must give signed permission for their children to participate in the course; and leaders, parents and students must sign a code of conduct. All leaders are issued with a book which contains contact information, codes of conduct, medical incident report records, rooming lists and safety guidelines. Students are segregated by gender at night and are supervised by leaders. They are also supervised during outdoor activities and on breaks. There is a strict social media policy in place. A reunion is held every year for leaders and students after ANOIS which keeps connections strong and helps to foster the ANOIS leaders of the future.

Reviewers were assured that the same stringent rules, policies and procedures apply to the Lourdes Pilgrimage. Every year 110 young people and 11 adult leaders travel to Lourdes. They are divided into 10 groups of 11, each with one co-ordinator and one adult leader. Leaders are over the age of 23 years, Garda vetted, and are mostly former participants in diocesan youth programmes.

The pilgrimage organisers strive to achieve a gender balance in leadership and endeavour to ensure that at least one of the leaders has a background in mental health services/education or psychology. They also ensure that two leaders have a current first aid qualification.

Participants and youth leaders are made aware of who the designated person is if they have any concerns or complaints and of the numbers and contact details for the CFA (Tusla) and Gardaí as well as the Diocesan Director for Safeguarding. They are encouraged to visit the diocesan website which has the required safeguarding information along with numbers for support groups. An appraisal is conducted by the pilgrimage leaders every year to ensure that high standards are maintained and the pilgrimage guidelines are updated and reviewed. These guidelines were last updated in February 2020 and have been examined by reviewers. The guidelines are clear, simple and very well laid out which made them very easy to read and understand. They contain amendments that have been made following the 2019 Pilgrimage.

#### Use of Social Media by Church Personnel

Reviewers studied the policy document *Use of Technology* (pages 68-70) in the *Limerick Diocesan Policy (2017)* which clearly sets out the parameters for safe and acceptable use of mobile phones, bundled text and e-mail messaging, photography/digital cameras, social media, webcams and CCTV. Relevant material developed for altar servers includes reference to CCTV and webcams. Reviewers interviewed the person in charge of Youth Ministry, trainers, leaders and participants of youth groups visited in the diocese and are satisfied that this policy is being implemented by them. ANOIS participants described to reviewers how the strict policy on mobile phone usage benefitted them during their time on the leadership programme.

#### Whistleblowing/Complaints

The appropriate policy and procedure is in place (p.68-70, *Limerick Diocesan Policy, 2017*) but it has not needed to be used to date. The policy contains a thought provoking message for potential whistle-blowers: *Don't think 'what if I'm wrong?' think 'what if I'm right?'*

#### Visiting Clergy Seeking to Minister in the Diocese of Limerick

Diocesan clergy who are in ministry are vetted every three years; in 2018 the diocese adopted a practice of also requiring vetting for those who are out of ministry. Clergy who come into the diocese can only minister if they receive faculties from the bishop. The *Requirements for Involvement in any form of Ministry in the Diocese of Limerick* policy is a very comprehensive document which provides clear guidance to priests, deacons, Religious Brothers and Sisters and lay ministers who wish to minister in Limerick diocese. Procedures are divided into 5 categories as follows:

- Priests/deacons who wish to minister at a once-off event or multiple events (e.g. funeral), maximum of 3 days.
- Priests/deacons who wish to be registered as a temporary solemniser for a wedding.
- Priests/deacons who wish to minister for longer periods (including priests wishing to be given faculties within the diocese).
- Religious Brothers and Sisters (non-ordained/ in any form of consecrated life) who wish to minister in the diocese.
- Lay ministers who wish to minister in the diocese.

The document is available in hard copy and on the diocesan website, including standardised forms for each category. The Diocesan Secretary demonstrated how the policy is implemented, in response to an email from a foreign cleric who wished to minister in the diocese.

The system to ensure visiting clergy are in good standing is centralised and administered from the Diocesan Office and overseen by the Diocesan Secretary. Reviewers commend the detailed procedures that are in place and believe that the safeguarding team take the responsibility for checking visiting priests seriously, as they view this as an area of high risk.

### Ecclesial Movements

Two Religious Orders have become established in the Diocese in recent years. They are the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. The Director of Safeguarding outlined how the bishop's permission for them to be based in the diocese was conditional on their compliance with the National Board's Safeguarding Standards and the Diocesan Policy and Procedures. Both orders were asked to nominate and maintain a link safeguarding person to liaise directly with the Director of Safeguarding, and he meets them at least twice a year, with one of these meetings taking place on their premises. All their personnel are Garda vetted through the diocese and attend the diocesan safeguarding training. They also must inform the diocese of any safeguarding issues arising, and this has happened on one occasion in respect of one of their members. The National Board was notified of this, and in line with Data Protection legislation that case will be reviewed when the Congregation is having its National Board Review, as the Provincial of the relevant Order has responsibility for managing it.

The diocese has also conducted specific training on risk assessment for youth activities with one of the congregation that has an active youth ministry. Both orders are registered with the National Board.

There are two other very active ecclesial movements in the diocese, the Maranatha and the Neocatechumenal Way. These are lay-led but have priest members. Maranatha are long-established and have a significant presence in a couple of parishes in Limerick Diocese. The Neocatechumenal Way is more recent. The Director of Safeguarding explained how the bishop arranged for him to meet with their leadership team prior to giving his approval for The Neocatechumenal Way to come to the diocese. The Safeguarding Support Officer and the Director of Safeguarding meet with both of these movements at least twice per year, and any of their members involved in ministry with children are Garda vetted through the diocese and attend the diocesan safeguarding training.

The National Board has recently issued a list of religious groups that they will deal with directly; and the Limerick Diocese is currently planning to hold a seminar during 2020 for all such groups. It is clear from the procedures and written records examined, and from the discussions held with staff, volunteers and children that Bishop Leahy and the safeguarding team are committed to ensuring the maintenance of safe environments for children in the Limerick diocese. Overall, the requirements of Standard 1 are being met and managed effectively.

## **Standard 2: Responding to Reports**

A banner heading entitled *Information for People Who Wish to Report Abuse* is clearly displayed on the homepage of the diocesan website; and this links to the Safeguarding page which clearly displays contact information for the Limerick Diocese, the Gardai and CFA (Tusla). There is a link to and an explanation of Standard 2, which in turn connects to the 2017 *Diocese of Limerick – Safeguarding Children Procedures* document (pages 73 – 96). This document provides comprehensive guidance for persons responding to reports of child abuse made by the following: adults; children; anonymous reports; a person admitting to child abuse; allegations not Church related; and admissions made during confession. The policy can easily be accessed through the diocesan website and provides links to the appropriate forms and to the National Board's website.

### Incidents or notifications of allegations since the last Review

According to diocesan records, **21** allegations were received by the dioceses since the last Review in 2012 against **18** priests and former priests.

- There were **13** allegations against **10** Limerick Diocesan priests and former priests, **5** of who are deceased.
- **5** allegations related to **5** priests who could not be identified due to the limited information available.
- **3** allegations were made to the diocese of Limerick against **3** priests from other dioceses.

Of the allegations received, **11** have been made against **8** living priests (5 of whom are Limerick Diocesan priests),

- **3** of whom are in ministry;
- **3** are out of ministry; and
- **2** priests are retired and in good standing

There were no allegations made against non-ordained religious Brothers and Sisters since the last Review in 2012.

A preliminary canonical investigation was immediately commenced on receipt of allegations in relation to **5** of the living respondents. A preliminary canonical investigation has not been conducted in relation to **1** respondent, and cannot be until full information and directions from statutory authorities are received in relation to same.

The remaining two (**2**) cases are being managed by the relevant (home) dioceses to which these priests belong.

**Table 1 – Number of allegations against priests received by the Limerick Diocese since previous Review**

Cleric No	Current status	Number of allegations	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	National Board notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
1	Deceased	1	Yes – within five days	Yes – within five days	Yes – within five days	N/A
2	Living - out of ministry at time of Review	1	Yes - within two days	Yes - within two days	Yes - within two days	Yes
3	Living – in ministry	1	Tusla notified Gardai	Diocese notified by Tusla	Yes – no date on file	Yes
4	Deceased	1	Yes - within two days	Yes - within two days	Yes - within two days	N/A
5	Deceased	1	Yes – within two weeks	Yes – within two weeks	Yes – within two weeks	N/A
6	Identity not confirmed	1	Gardai notified by Tusla	Diocese notified by Tusla	N/A	N/A
7	Deceased	1	Yes – within two days	Yes – within five weeks	Yes – within four days	N/A
8	Living – in ministry	1	Yes – within five days	Yes – within five days	Yes – within five days	Yes
9	Retired – priest in good standing	1	Yes – within four days	Yes – within five days	Yes – within three weeks	Not possible, as complainant not identified
10	Living - out of ministry at time of Review	1	Yes – within three days	Yes – within three days	Yes – within three days	Yes
11	Living – in ministry	1	Yes – within one month	Yes – within one month	Yes – within one month	N/A
12	Identity not confirmed*	1	Gardai notified by Tusla	Diocese notified by Tusla	Yes – within eight days	N/A
13	Living - out of ministry	4	Yes – within one month in all cases	Yes – within one month in all cases	Yes – within one month in all cases	Yes
14	Retired – priest in good standing	1	Diocese notified by Gardai	Diocese notified by Tusla	Yes – within three weeks	Not possible, as complainant not identified
15	Deceased	1	Yes – within two weeks	Yes – within two weeks	Yes – within two weeks	N/A
16	Identity not confirmed	1	Yes – within two days	Yes – within two days	Yes – within two weeks	N/A
17	Identity not confirmed	1	Yes – within four days	Yes – within four days	No record on file	N/A

<b>18</b>	Identity not confirmed		Yes –within three weeks	Yes – within five weeks	Yes – within five weeks	N/A
	Total allegations	<b>21</b>				

\*A name was given in this case, but no priest of this name had served in the diocese

Case files in the Limerick Diocese are organised and managed meticulously. They are stored in locked cabinets in a secure office. Reviewers examined the files concerning **21** allegations of sexual abuse against **18** diocesan priests or former priests (described above). On examination, the files are well structured and prepared in accordance with National Board guidance and standards. The correct procedures were followed in relation to the reporting of these allegations to the Gardai, CFA (Tusla) and the National Board, and in relation to the canonical investigation of each case. There is evidence in each of the files examined by reviewers of stringent and timely reporting of allegations and of good cooperation between the diocese and the statutory bodies in relation to consultation and reporting of cases.

Risk assessments were carried out on each respondent and in some cases psychological assessments were also conducted. Safety plans were put in place and reviewed at regular intervals and the cases were reviewed at Inter-Agency and Diocesan Advisory Committee meetings.

#### Inter-agency meetings

A good working relationship was evidenced between the diocese, the CFA (Tusla) and An Garda Síochána in case files examined. Reviewers also conducted telephone interviews with the Detective Sergeant in Charge of An Garda Síochána, Limerick Child Protective Services and the Principal Social Worker with CFA (Tusla) Mid-Western Service. The D/Sergeant described how he has an *excellent, professional relationship* with the diocese, while the Principal Social Worker outlined how the diocese are *always very helpful* and *I really believe that the diocese are notifying as they should*.

Reviewers learned that Inter-agency cooperation in the Limerick Diocese operates on 3 levels:

1. The Director of Safeguarding communicates regularly with the statutory agencies in respect of cases.
2. The bishop holds an inter-agency review meeting at least annually involving senior members of the statutory agencies to ensure that they are satisfied with engagement with and by the diocese.
3. Occasionally, the three agencies agree particular liaison arrangements, such as the nomination of senior personnel to the steering group planning the next Inter-agency safeguarding conference.

The reviewers note the delay by An Garda Síochána in relation to one of the cases which brought prolonged suffering to the complainant, the respondent and their families. Reviewers are satisfied that the diocese followed correct procedures in a timely manner. However, the complainant's family should be revisited with a view to ensuring that every avenue of help has been explored in relation to their case, as their suffering is still evident. The *Diocese of Limerick Safeguarding Plan, 2019 – 2021* (Standard 3.3, p.16) states that *the Director of Safeguarding is authorised to arrange and fund counselling for all complainants and members of their family. This is ordinarily arranged via Towards Healing but alternative arrangements are made if the complainant wishes*.

The diocese provides an accessible service and immediate response to persons wishing to report abuse. It has a good relationship with the statutory authorities and ensures that all allegations of abuse are reported in a timely manner. Therefore, the requirements of Standard 2 are being met.

### **Standard 3: Care of Complainants**

In advance of the fieldwork, a notice was placed on the diocesan website and parish newsletters informing readers of the forthcoming review and inviting anyone to come forward to the National Board if they wished to express any opinions relating to child safeguarding practice in the diocese. Two (2) people accepted this invitation and wrote directly to the National Board. The diocese also sent out questionnaires to 5 complainants, and to 5 family members of complainants, and it was requested that these would be returned directly to the National Board. Questionnaires were returned by 3 complainants and 3 family members. Other sources of information about engagement with complainants were (i) discussions with Bishop Leahy and the Director of Safeguarding; (ii) studying the case management file records.

The Limerick Diocese is currently involved in the care and support of approximately 12 complainants/family members. Personal contact has been made with all of these people by the Director of Safeguarding and this is recorded in the case management files. Reviewers were assured that the Diocesan Secretary (female) will be undergoing DLP training. This could give complainants a choice in terms of the gender of the DLP they wish to engage with. However, reviewers wonder, in terms of the workload of the DLP, if it is the role best placed to support complainants and suggest that consideration be given to the appointment of an independent, suitably qualified Complainant Support Person.

Reviewers were informed that complainants are offered a range of services through the diocesan safeguarding service, including *Towards Healing* and *Towards Peace*; and that the needs of the complainant are determined on a case by case basis.

In relation to cases where financial compensation was sought by complainants, reviewers were advised that settlements have been reached in all cases, without recourse to the courts. In response to a query by reviewers whether complainants were being discouraged from seeking legally binding financial compensation, Bishop Leahy and the Director of Safeguarding affirmed the rights of complainants to go before the courts at any time. Their approach is to assist complainants to avoid a difficult and drawn-out court process if possible. In every case the complainant had independent legal advice.

Evidence of the nature and extent of contact with complainants, and support services offered/provided, were examined in case management files, including any financial or other supports/settlements agreed, as applicable. Records of practice in this area were found to be of an acceptable standard and files were well organised and maintained.

Reviewers suggest that, in future, a separate section be created for each complainant within the larger respondent file. This would help maintain an on-going focus by the case manager on the support needs of the complainant, and how these are being met. The diocesan safeguarding service proposed to reviewers that there may be a broader issue to be considered by the National Board, i.e.

in developing a process by which the needs of the complainant could be balanced with those of the respondent, such as quarterly reviews of complainants in existing cases.

The recent introduction of a one-page document which is provided to all complainants, containing contact details of relevant support services, statutory agencies, National Board and the Diocese of Limerick Safeguarding service, is a positive development.

There is a panel of **3** complainant support persons (**2** female, **1** male) from different professional backgrounds available to complainants, but only one of these has been used on one occasion to date. The Director of Safeguarding confirmed that the bishop has never refused a support plan for a complainant recommended by him.

Questionnaires were forwarded by the diocese to **2** family members of a complainant from the 2012 Review; and in their responses, in which they expressed negative views of both the diocese and the National Board, both family members requested a meeting with reviewers. However, following due consideration, a decision was taken not to meet with the family members, as the case does not come within the remit of the current Review

#### Interviews with Complainants

The reviewers are very grateful to those complainants who were willing to share their experiences. Two complainants and three family members of complainants described sensitive, caring and supportive responses by the diocese, sustained over a medium to long-term period.

However, there were three others for whom engagement with the diocese was less positive, and for whom the issues involved remain unresolved for them. All complainants are different, as are their subjective experiences of similar interventions. This highlights the importance of active listening to ensure that the particular concerns of each individual are being addressed in a way that they experience as helpful and respectful. The reviewers have provided feedback to the diocese on the descriptions provided by these three interviewees to assist safeguarding staff to address anything that now needs to be attended to.

Overall, there is a lot of evidence of positive complainant care by the Bishop of Limerick and his safeguarding staff team, and this is commended. The requirements of Standard 3 are met.

## **Standard 4 – Management of Respondents**

### Priests receiving care and support under a Management Plan

There is a Management Plan in place for each of the **5** living respondent priests in the diocese. The management and care of respondents is carefully recorded in the case files, which include a chronology of allegations made; diocesan responses (including risk management records); records of reporting and cooperation with the statutory agencies; and case management advisory meetings. All canonical documents, including reports of preliminary enquiries, decrees and precepts are included in the case files.

There is evidence in the files that respondents' physical, emotional and financial needs are attended to in an efficient manner. Reviewers found evidence in the case management files that each respondent has been offered the services of a priest advisor and a canon lawyer. Risk and Psychological Assessments are conducted and canonical processes are managed in a timely way.

#### Priest Advisors

All respondent priests are assigned a priest advisor. There are 4 priest advisors attached to the Limerick Diocese. The Reviewers met with these advisors, who outlined the importance of their role in supporting the respondent once an allegation is received, right through the investigation process and especially when the priest has been returned to ministry. Each of the priest advisors has received the national standard of one day training.

However, the Director of Safeguarding has highlighted a need for extra training for priest advisors to help them to deal with issues that arise for them during the course of their support process with respondents, which can continue for many years. Reviewers were assured that a specific priest and counsellor are available to provide supervision for priest advisors in the Limerick Diocese. Bishop Leahy has an informal meeting with the priest advisors annually to assure them of his on-going support.

#### Canon lawyer

Reviewers interviewed the canon lawyer attached to the Limerick Diocese, who as the advisor to the bishop and the Director of Safeguarding cannot represent any respondent in the diocese. Reviewers were informed that there is a list of 3 canon lawyers made available to respondent priests, who are free to choose their own canon lawyer.

#### Vicar for Pastoral Care of priests

The vicar for pastoral care of priests was interviewed, and he outlined how he provides pastoral care and support to priests who are in difficulty. The bishop may offer the support of the vicar for pastoral care to a respondent, or the respondent may contact him directly. His role is a very flexible one which differs from that of the priest advisor in that it is informal and is deliberately organised to exclude him from participating in formal safeguarding procedures, such as meetings and decision making. He explains to priests that he must report any disclosure they might make to him, but that otherwise his engagement with them is confidential.

#### Case Management Advisory Committee

The Case Management Advisory Committee is comprised of seven persons from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. It convenes 3-4 times per year, but meets more often if a specific issue arises. The Chairperson was interviewed who described how current and live cases are presented by the Director of Safeguarding before the committee in an anonymised written format. The committee provides advice on cases, based on members' professional experience; and it makes recommendations to Bishop Leahy, taking the welfare of the complainant, the care of the respondent and the safety of the parish/community into account. Reviewers noted that the minutes of the Advisory Committee meetings are attached to the files of each of the five living priests that have been considered by the committee since the last review.

The reporting responsibilities of the diocese to the statutory authorities are not deferred to await the outcome of discussions of the Case Management Advisory Committee; and these are handled by the Director of Safeguarding.

#### Respondent questionnaires

Prior to conducting this Review, questionnaires were forwarded to **7** respondent priests regarding their experience of care by the Limerick Diocese. It must be noted that not all allegations result in a finding that abuse has happened. Five (**5**) respondents replied to the questionnaires; and of these, **3** were satisfied with the pastoral support that they have received; **1** respondent was dissatisfied and felt he was treated *guilty until proven innocent*; and **1** respondent felt that he was treated unfairly when he had a complaint made against him many years ago, but he acknowledged that *there are better structures and systems in place now*.

There is a very clear, methodical process for ensuring that respondents are managed and supported in a timely way in the Limerick Diocese. Therefore, the requirements of standard 4 have been met.

### **Standard 5: Training**

Reviewers interviewed the five diocesan safeguarding trainers, one of whom is the full time Training Coordinator, Youth Ministry coordinator and a Tutor with the National Board. All trainers have received training accredited by the National Board and meet regularly with the Director of Safeguarding. Reviewers had a very informative meeting with the training team, in which the trainers outlined the gradual shift in people's attitudes, from resistance in the very early days of training to positivity from realising that safeguarding offers protection to all stakeholders.

#### Training Plan

Reviewers were informed that the training team have decided to delay finalising their 3-year training plan pending receipt of updated training materials and attendance at a one day training session with the National Board, which has recently updated its training requirements.

The trainers advised reviewers that all current members of the clergy, youth ministers and safeguarding representatives have undertaken safeguarding training. There are **20** new people waiting to be trained once the updated Training Manual is available from the National Board. The following are priorities for training: **10** clergy and **64** parish representatives for Refresher Training; diocesan administration staff for an Information Session. A training needs analysis will be carried out with a focus group of sacristans to identify their needs for training.

Having attended a three-hour safeguarding information session in the diocese, reviewers emphasise the importance of including current Irish legislation, such as the Children First Act, 2015 in information sessions, and of stressing to stakeholders that it is now a crime for mandated persons not to report abuse.

Limerick diocesan trainers plan to deliver five different programme types, in accordance with updated National Board guidelines:

1. Full day training – 5 hours
2. Information sessions – 3hours
3. Refresher sessions – 3hours
4. Mandated person training – 1.5hours
5. Young leaders training – 3hours

### Numbers Trained

The following is a breakdown of training delivered in the Limerick Diocese to date:

2016/2017:	127 attended training
2018:	140 attended training
2019:	71 attended training
2020:	33 attended training to date (youth ministry leaders)

### Database

The reviewers were shown the integrated database (developed in 2017) which includes records of vetting and training. This shows exactly who has been trained and when they need to be retrained, and it informs the training needs analysis and planning for the annual training programme. Historical information is being gradually uploaded to the database. The creation of this comprehensive database is an exemplar which is commended by reviewers.

### ANOIS Leadership Training Programme

The reviewers were invited to visit the ANOIS Leadership Training Programme in Castletown, Co. Laois. Reviewers observed the ANOIS programme in operation and spoke to some of the leaders involved. A group of young participants was interviewed about their experience of the programme. Both the leaders and the participants had a clear idea of safeguarding procedures and the importance of ensuring the safety of everyone in the group. Reviewers were particularly impressed by the customisation of training to highlight real life scenarios, encompassing the language, behaviour and listening of the young leaders. In the words of their trainer, *safeguarding is about reminding young people about vulnerable moments as much as abuse*. The young people interviewed described how powerful the ANOIS experience has been for them in nurturing their faith and giving them the confidence and self-esteem to become the leaders of the future. The ANOIS programme is an exemplar of leadership training for young people. It is encouraging to hear that other dioceses are interested in adopting the programme.

The reviewers were encouraged by the energy and commitment of the diocesan training team to ensuring that training requirements for all safeguarding personnel are met. While the current safeguarding plan has not been finalised, reviewers were impressed by the knowledge, experience and forward planning of the trainers and of the priority they give to safeguarding training and its practical implementation in Limerick Diocese. Discussions with the different safeguarding personnel, leaders, parents and young people alike revealed that the need for training is fully recognised by those involved and is viewed as an important requisite for anyone participating in Church related activities. Therefore, reviewers are satisfied that the requirements of Standard 5 have been met.

## Standard 6: Communications

There is a well-defined commitment to communicating the Church's safeguarding message in the Limerick Diocese. The diocesan website is inviting, vibrant and easy to use. There are two headline banners to the Safeguarding section, and special links for (a) people who wish to report abuse, and (b) people affected by abuse. The website includes clear, easily accessible information on all aspects of safeguarding, including policies and procedures, Garda vetting, codes of behaviour, training and resources.

The *Diocese of Limerick – Safeguarding Procedures* manual was revised and updated in 2020. It clearly and comprehensively outlines all the diocesan expectations, policies, procedures, documentation and instructions relevant to the seven National Board Standards. This can be accessed in hard copy and on the diocesan website and is a key reference point for all child safeguarding operations in the diocese. There is also a diocesan *Facebook* page which currently has approximately 3,500 followers.

Three members of the Communication Sub-committee were interviewed. This committee meets 4 times per year, and it oversees the implementation of the three-year diocesan Communications Strategy. Members explained how they are constantly striving to update and improve the website to ensure that it is current, relevant and evolving. Reviewers were given a demonstration of how the website is monitored, reviewed and modified every two weeks, or sooner if the need arises. Reviewers noted the keen attention to detail in ensuring that all safeguarding developments and updates are regularly communicated to the safeguarding team and added to the diocesan website. Reviewers expressed the desire to see more child-friendly policies and codes of behaviour developed. These should be created with and for children, in a language that children can understand, and displayed at a level that they can reach. The diocese was advised to look at models of participation, e.g. the *Hart Model* (1992), or the *Lundy Model* (2007).

The communications team has been responsible for a number of safeguarding initiatives in the diocese, including:

- The annual Safeguarding Newsletter.
- Safeguarding Sunday held on the last Sunday in September each year.
- Development of *Ministry of the Altar Server* policy booklet in soft and hard copy.
- Production of a bank card size *Priest's Safeguarding Policy Information* booklet.
- Development of user-friendly posters for the Polish community.

The *Communication Plan 2019-2021* was studied by reviewers. It outlines the communication strategy in relation to the diocesan website, *Facebook*, parish and safeguarding newsletters, inter-agency cooperation, and target groups such as priests, safeguarding representatives, lay helpers and young people.

The limited value of printed materials as a means of communicating with children was highlighted to reviewers. The communication team outlined their plans to actively seek ways of effectively listening to children and engaging with them. During the feedback meeting with Bishop Leahy, reviewers discussed the possibility that this could be done through the forum of youth ministry, altar servers and the John Paul 11 Award participants. A Youth Advisory Board could be established to give a voice to the young people of the diocese.

The reviewers were informed that the *Building Collaboration* conference, which was first held between safeguarding agencies and stakeholders in 2018, will be held again this year, and then every three years thereafter. Reviewers learned that as a result of this conference, Mary Immaculate College is developing a Resource Centre for Safeguarding and the diocese hopes that this will evolve into the provision of professional programmes in safeguarding. This is a prime example of cooperation and innovation between agencies, and is commended.

Reviewers were impressed by the intensity, innovation and commitment to achieving a best practice approach to communications in the Limerick Diocese and are satisfied that the requirements of Standard 6 have been met.

### **Standard 7: Quality Assurance**

Reviewers checked the minutes of the Safeguarding Committee; and they were also invited to attend a Safeguarding Committee Meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. Staff and volunteers presented as dedicated and enthusiastic in sharing ideas and experiences and were open to learning and improvement. Committee members explained their areas of expertise to reviewers in relation to the *Diocese of Limerick Safeguarding Plan, 2019 -2021*. This plan is thoughtfully divided according to the seven safeguarding standards, which in turn are divided into specific objectives, actions, responsibilities, start and target completion dates. It is noted that a huge amount of research, learning and forward planning has been applied to each objective in this ambitious blueprint.

Reviewers also examined previous safeguarding plans and were impressed by the fact that the Safeguarding Plan 2019-2021 is not a static instrument, but is rather a tool which changes and evolves as goals are reached, new learning is gained, and new ideas unfold in relation to the seven safeguarding standards. The suggestion to prioritise more age-appropriate material for children has already been added to the *Safeguarding Plan, 2019 -2021*, which plan can easily be accessed on the diocesan website.

The Safeguarding Parish Support Worker oversees the completion of parish self-audits and provides the link between the diocese and the people of the parishes, visiting them regularly and ensuring that their safeguarding needs are communicated to the diocese and vice versa. During parish visits, reviewers noticed that the support worker has built up a warm, empathetic relationship with the stakeholders, which has encouraged them to embrace the safeguarding standards and allows for regular communication between the parishes and the diocesan safeguarding team. The parish safeguarding support person is a novel and effective role, which could usefully be adopted by other dioceses.

#### Parish self-audits

Based on discussions with the parish safeguarding support person, the following points were noted by reviewers:

- The Limerick Diocese had a 100% response / return rate from parishes to the 2019 safeguarding self-audit.
- The returns were completed and received more promptly than previously.

- Improvements have been noted; namely, there has been a better standard in completion of forms by parishes and evidence of more considered reviewing and responding to questions at parish level.
- The audit findings indicate that safeguarding is well embedded across the diocese and is increasingly being seen as a routine part of parish life.
- There has been a gradual increase in youth ministries across the parishes in the Limerick Diocese (i.e. an increase of 7.2% in 2019 (162 youth ministries) up from 2018 (151 ministries).

The findings of the audit are presented to and considered by the bishop and the diocesan Safeguarding Committee. Any actions arising are incorporated into the diocesan Safeguarding Plan and utilised to inform safeguarding decision-making by the diocese. For example, a small number of parishes where safeguarding was not appropriately prioritised in the past have benefitted from changes to their practice brought about as a result of the audit. Additionally, the layout of the self-audit form was amended for the 2019 audit, based on feedback received from parishes following the 2018 audit process.

A letter from the bishop and the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee is sent annually to all parishes, providing an overview of the audit outcomes and addressing particular matters relevant to each parish.

The bishop appoints members of the Policy and Governance Committee, including the Chairs of the Safeguarding Committee, the Vetting Committee and the Case Management Advisory Committee. This committee is the senior forum which provides support to the bishop to meet his responsibilities in relation to upholding the seven safeguarding standards in the Limerick Diocese. The Chairs of the various committees were interviewed by reviewers and confirmed that they found this process helpful in sharing ideas and in ensuring that their safeguarding ambitions reflect the overall diocesan safeguarding ethos.

The reviewers are satisfied that Limerick Diocese has fully met the requirements of Standard 7, and shows a progressive approach to the maintenance and development of a high quality service.

## **Conclusion**

There is a warm feel to the work environment in Limerick Diocese and Bishop Leahy provides every resource to ensure his team are supported, allegations are reported, respondents are managed and monitored fairly, and children are protected. It is clear to the reviewers that the diocese has done a great deal of reaching out to complainants in a compassionate and effective manner, and the supports and assistance provided in many cases are exemplary. The diocesan safeguarding service is encouraged to continue this very progressive approach. In doing this, the reviewers would encourage diocesan safeguarding personnel to take account of the feedback provided by all of the complainants interviewed in the course of this Review process.

Overall, reviewers agree that there is significant evidence across all the standards of the dedication and hard work of enthusiastic and innovative people, striving to bring life and practical meaning to the safeguarding standards.