

NBSCCCI Newsletter

Latest News from the National Office for Safeguarding
Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland

Autumn 2026

National Office Staff

Click on any of the links
below to send an email
directly to any member of
staff

Chief Executive Officer [Aidan Gordon](#)

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Administrators [Imelda Ashe](#)
[Ann Cunningham](#)

"Your mission is to help ensure that abuse is prevented. Yet prevention is never just a set of protocols or procedures. It is about helping to form, throughout the Church, a culture of care, in which the protection of minors and persons in vulnerable situations is not seen as an obligation imposed from outside, but as a natural expression of faith."

Pope Leo XIV: Mar 2026

Introduction

Dear Colleagues,
As the leaves turn and the air grows crisp, this autumn season brings both solemn remembrance and joyful celebration.



Maynooth Pontifical University enhanced using AI

In recent weeks, our Church community has experienced moments of deep reflection, shared remembrance, and renewed hope. One such moment was the unveiling of a commemorative piece at Sean Ross Abbey, an event organised by victims and survivors, a gesture of quiet strength and collective acknowledgement that honoured lives and stories long held close to the heart.

The second was the Towards Peace "Moment of Solidarity" in Naas, where survivors, families, and supporters gathered to walk, reflect, and plant a tree of hope. It was a day marked by courage, compassion, and connection, reminding us that healing is a journey we undertake together, step by step, with gentleness and resolve. Alongside these solemn and meaningful events, the last few weeks have also carried the joyful energy of celebration.

Contents/Highlights

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The grounds of Maynooth Pontifical University have echoed with the carefree sounds of graduates and their families, laughter, whooping and hollering, and the scramble for the perfect photo spot. The image opposite, created using artificial intelligence (AI), captures that sense of renewal: flying caps, celebrating achievement and possibility. The joy mirrors the resilience and hope that continue to guide our shared journey toward healing and peace.

I found the process of generating this image using AI remarkably easy to do. Its accessibility highlights both the benefits and dangers of emerging technologies. AI can help us communicate creatively and inclusively, but it also reminds us of the importance of safeguarding truth, dignity, and privacy in the digital age. As we embrace innovation, we must remain vigilant, ensuring that technology serves compassion and transparency, never confusion or harm.

Inside this edition, you will find updates on the ongoing safeguarding work across Church bodies.

As always, I want to acknowledge the dedication of safeguarding personnel across Ireland who continue to carry out this work with integrity and compassion. Your efforts, often quiet, often unseen make a profound difference.

Aida Sada

Practice Focus: Updates to Safeguarding Guidance

Strengthening Safe Recruitment

Over recent months, Guidance S1.A Guidance on Safe Recruitment has been significantly updated to reflect the enhanced standards set out in the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's (SBNI) Safer Recruitment Guidance published in April 2026. The SBNI updated this document in August 2026, and NBSCCCI staff are currently working through the updated version. NBSCCCI will update its guidance to reflect any changes. The Catholic Church is represented on the SBNI Interfaith Committee by two members, Philip O'Hara, Director of Safeguarding/DLP, Diocese of Down & Connor and Aidan Gordon, CEO, NBSCCCI. There is no equivalent statutory safeguarding body in the Republic of Ireland.

The guidance produced by the SBNI is of particular significance given the breadth of expertise involved in its development and the statutory role played by the SBNI in terms of child safeguarding and protection. The Safer Recruitment Guidance published by the SBNI is the product of a comprehensive consultation process involving a wide range of agencies and organisations from across the safeguarding sector in Northern Ireland and as such, it reflects recognised good practice in safer recruitment and safeguarding. The implementation of this updated guidance further strengthens the Church's commitment to ensuring that all individuals are recruited safely, transparently, and in accordance with best practice. It also serves as an important safeguard in deterring unsuitable candidates from seeking positions of trust within Church ministries and services.

The SBNI guidance reinforces that safer recruitment is not a single event, but rather “a continuing process of improvement” that must be embedded throughout all Church bodies. It highlights that, while vetting and criminal record checks are essential elements of recruitment, “they alone do not guarantee... safety”. Thus, reminding us that safeguarding begins long before a candidate is appointed and continues throughout their time in ministry, employment or voluntary service.

Guidance S1.A has been strengthened to align with this approach, supported by guidance on vetting (S1.B), induction processes (S2.A) and codes of behaviour for adults (S3.A). The updates emphasise that safe recruitment must start with clear role definitions, transparent advertising, and structured shortlisting processes, ensuring that unsuitable candidates can be identified and screened out at the earliest possible stage. The SBNI document stresses that organisations must “apply good safeguarding practice... [through] robust recruitment and selection procedures” for anyone undertaking work with children or young people.

Enhancements relate to identity verification, reference checking, and candidate self-disclosure. Guidance S1.A now mirrors the SBNI's expectations that references should specifically address safeguarding suitability and that any discrepancies or concerns identified must be followed up appropriately. The SBNI guidance states that references should seek information on “the candidate's suitability to work with children and young people...[and] knowledge and understanding of child protection and safeguarding”. These recommendations are now reflected directly within the updated Church recruitment templates.

The revised guidance also places greater emphasis on the meaningful involvement of children and of victims and survivors of abuse in recruitment processes. This may include contributing to the development of interview questions, providing feedback on recruitment practices, and/or helping to identify the personal qualities and values required for safe and effective ministry.

Collectively, these updates ensure that Guidance S1.A is fully aligned with current safeguarding expectations and reflective of contemporary best practice. They reinforce our shared commitment to ensuring that every appointment within the Church is made with care, diligence, and an unwavering focus on the safety, wellbeing, and dignity of children, young people, and victims and survivors of abuse.

You can find the updated guidance here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/creating-safe-environments> and you can review the SBNI guidance here <https://www.safeguardingni.org/sites/default/files/2026-05/SBNI%20Safer%20Recruitment%20Guidance%202026%20v2.0.pdf>



Data Protection & Child Safeguarding: Key Guidance from GAP Paper 14

GAP Paper 14, Data Protection and Child Safeguarding, offers timely guidance for Church bodies on the complex and often misunderstood relationship between safeguarding responsibilities and data protection law. As the paper notes, safeguarding and data protection intersect in ways that require “careful alignment between data protection principles and safeguarding obligations,” particularly when handling sensitive information relating to allegations, victims and survivors, clergy, volunteers, and children.

The Church, like all organisations, must comply with GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018. These laws require personal data to be handled lawfully, fairly, transparently, and securely. GAP Paper 14 highlights that good data protection is not only a legal requirement; it is also a matter of trust, dignity, and pastoral responsibility.

The paper outlines the core GDPR principles: lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, data minimisation, accuracy, storage limitation, and integrity/confidentiality. Individuals also have rights such as access, rectification, erasure, portability, and objection. These principles apply directly to safeguarding records, which often contain special category data such as health information, allegations, or pastoral notes.

Ultimately, GAP Paper 14 reinforces that data protection is integral to safeguarding. Protecting personal information, especially sensitive safeguarding records, is part of protecting people. The paper encourages Church bodies to strengthen policies, train personnel, and embed good practice across all ministries and administrative structures.

Good Practice Corner

This season we wish to highlight the valuable information available on Human Trafficking within the Safeguarding section of the Diocese of Limerick website. [Human Trafficking - Limerick Diocese](#)

Human trafficking is the recruitment, movement, harbouring, transfer, receipt, or control of a person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude, forced criminality, forced begging, and organ removal. Trafficking can occur within a country or across borders and, in the case of children, does not require evidence of force, coercion, or deception.

In the Republic of Ireland, human trafficking is primarily defined under the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008, as amended by the Criminal Law (Human trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013.

In Northern Ireland, the principal legislation is the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The Safeguarding section of the Diocese of Limerick website provides a clear explanation of human trafficking, outlines the response of the Catholic Church in Ireland to this form of abuse and exploitation, and sets out the Diocese’s commitment to identifying, supporting and safeguarding victims of human trafficking.

We encourage all Church personnel to familiarise themselves with this important information and to remain vigilant to the signs of human trafficking within our communities.

A Moment of Solidarity: Walking Together Towards Peace

By Aidan Gordon, CEO and Member of the Towards Peace Oversight Committee

On Saturday, 5 September 2026, I had the privilege of standing alongside victims and survivors of abuse at the Moment of Solidarity hosted by Towards Peace in the Church of the Irish Martyrs, Naas. It was a day that reminded me why the work of Towards Peace matters, and why listening, presence, and compassion must remain at the heart of the Church's response to those who carry deep wounds.

From the moment participants arrived, there was a gentle atmosphere of welcome. As the event booklet expressed so simply, "Thank you for your presence here today. We hope you will find today's event meaningful and that it helps you on your journey towards peace." That sentence captured the spirit of the day: an invitation to be present, to be open, and to walk together.

The day began with the Walk of Solidarity, a voluntary 20–25 minute walk around the lakes in Naas. It was not a procession, nor a performance, but a human encounter, two people walking side by side, often strangers, sharing why they had come and what the day meant to them. Some walked in conversation; others walked in silence. Stewards wearing Towards Peace badges guided participants along the route, offering quiet reassurance. The walk embodied what Towards Peace strives to offer: companionship without intrusion, space without pressure, and solidarity without spectacle.

The ceremony in the church was deeply moving. Our MC, Clodagh Malone, welcomed everyone and gently guided us through what would unfold. Bishop Ger Nash spoke about why Towards Peace organised this event and why the theme of solidarity was chosen, because solidarity is not a slogan, but a commitment.

Then came the heart of the ceremony: seven survivors, each offering a brief reflection. After each reflection, the church fell into silence, followed by a piece of music, a hymn, psalm, chant, or song. This rhythm of truth, silence, and music created a space where pain could be acknowledged, dignity restored, and hope allowed to breathe.

As each survivor spoke, I was struck by the courage it takes to stand before others and speak from the depths of one's story. Their voices were not simply heard; they were honoured.

Towards the end of the ceremony, brown cardboard leaves were distributed. Participants were invited to write the name of someone they wished to be remembered. These leaves would later be burned, and the ashes mixed with the soil in which a memorial tree would be planted. This simple act carried profound symbolism: memory transformed into growth, grief woven into hope, and the past acknowledged as part of the soil from which healing can emerge.

We gathered outside as the tree was planted beside another planted fifteen years ago. People offered reflections, some spoken aloud, others held quietly within. It was a moment of communal witness, a reminder that healing is not solitary work but shared work. After the tree planting, tea, coffee, and sandwiches were served in the church porch. Conversations unfolded gently, some about the ceremony, some about life, some simply about the weather. Healing often happens in these small human exchanges, where people feel safe enough to speak or simply to be.

As I stood among survivors, supporters, clergy, and volunteers, I felt again the importance of the work entrusted to Towards Peace. This event was not a conclusion; it was a continuation, a reaffirmation of our commitment to walk with victims and survivors, to listen deeply, and to ensure that the Church's response is grounded in humility, compassion, and accountability. Solidarity is not a single moment. It is a way of being. As the National Board representative on the Steering Group of Towards Peace, I extend my gratitude to everyone who attended, everyone who shared, and everyone who supported this day. May the tree planted in Naas stand as a living sign of remembrance, resilience, and hope.



Ecclesiastical Provincial Area Meetings

As in previous years, the NBSCCCI is organising a series of four meetings, hosted by the four Archbishops. The purpose of the meeting is for staff from the National Office to meet with Bishops, Provincials, Superiors and safeguarding personnel from dioceses, religious congregations and orders across the ecclesiastical province area, to discuss common issues of interest, and to consider how further improvements in safeguarding practice can be made. This year we are delighted to let you know that Towards Peace and Towards Healing will be joining us at each of these sessions. Meetings are being held on the following dates:

Armagh: 15/10/2026

Tuam: 22/10/2026

Cashel and Emly: 29/10/2026

Dublin: 04/11/2026

Places can be booked online at this link: <https://www.safeguarding.ie/news-events/events>

Changes to Church Authorities

The NBSCCCI provides regular advice to Church authorities and organises an induction for new Church leaders annually. When a Church leader changes, it is important that you inform us and provide us with the contact details of the new Church leader by emailing admin@safeguarding.ie.

The NBSCCCI website provides links to Designated Liaison Persons within each diocese along with contact details for additional help and support. If you notice any errors in any of this information, please contact us so that we can make the appropriate amendments.

Training Returns

The NBSCCCI report on training across the country through our Annual Report. The training returns are an important part of monitoring our practice and ensuring we are actively keeping up to date with our safeguarding responsibilities. Completing training returns should be done following each training session; this will make it easier for you as trainers to keep track of where and whom you trained, along with eliminating a bigger task at the year-end. Registering for training is very simple and can be completed in a matter of minutes on the NBSCCCI website. One key point for sessions where two trainers deliver in partnership is to agree which trainer will record the training on the site. One trainer can then complete it on both trainers' behalf. Trainers can log their training by:

- Using the trainers' login button on www.safeguarding.ie, given to each trainer as part of their registration.
- Following login, click the 'log a training event online' button on the top right-hand side of the screen.
- Fill in the relevant details and then submit.
- The event will automatically be added to the database.

Please can you complete this process for every training event facilitated.

Submitting online is a much more efficient way of submitting returns. If you need any help with logging in or have forgotten your username and password, please contact acunningham@safeguarding.ie



Strengthening Safeguarding Through Annual Self-Audit: A Culture of Continuous Improvement Across Church Bodies

The annual safeguarding self-audit remains one of the most important quality-assurance tools available to Church bodies in Ireland. As outlined in *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland (2024)*, the self-audit is not simply an administrative requirement; it is a practical mechanism for evaluating compliance, strengthening safeguarding culture, and ensuring that the safety, welfare, and voice of children are central to Church life and ministry. The documents released this month provide updated guidance and templates to support dioceses, religious congregations, parishes, and communities in completing this process effectively.

Cumulative Auditing

Cumulative auditing is an auditing approach in which evidence, findings, and compliance information are gathered over a period of time rather than during a single audit event. The emphasis being that safeguarding is “an active and ongoing duty of care, not a retrospective paperwork exercise.”

Church bodies are encouraged to break the audit process into smaller tasks throughout the year rather than waiting until year-end. Regular monitoring helps identify issues early, such as expired vetting, overdue training, or gaps in recruitment and ensures that evidence of safeguarding activity is accurate, complete, and meaningful.

This continuous approach supports a shift from “passing a test” to embedding safeguarding as a lived culture. Evidence should demonstrate not only that activities occurred, but that they were effective, for example, risk assessments accompanied by documented follow-up actions.

A Two-Tiered Audit Structure for Larger Church Bodies

Dioceses and congregations with multiple parishes or communities continue to use a two-tiered system:

Tier 2: Parish & Community Self-Audit Completed locally by safeguarding representatives and parish priests/priors. It captures essential information on personnel, vetting, training, ministry with children, external groups, and safeguarding practices.

Tier 1: Church Body Self-Audit Completed centrally, incorporating Tier 2 returns alongside evidence relating to leadership, governance, training, policy implementation, and, where applicable, case management.

This structure lets us assess safeguarding across decentralised networks and supports developing targeted action plans and three-year safeguarding strategic plans. Smaller religious congregations with limited ministry may complete only the Tier 1 template, attaching Section 1 of the Parish & Community Self-Audit to ensure consistent recording of personnel, ministry locations, and safeguarding arrangements. This proportionate approach reduces administrative burden while maintaining compliance.

The updated templates provide practical, user-friendly structures for recording safeguarding activity: You can find the templates on the NBSCCCI website at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/our-services/policy-and-guidance>

The Safeguarding Committee plays a central role in reviewing audit findings, identifying strengths, gaps, and priorities. This analysis informs annual action plans and contributes to the development of three-year safeguarding strategic plans.

The self-audit should be complemented by other quality-assurance mechanisms, including compliance visits from Church leaders and annual reports from the Designated Liaison Person for Safeguarding (DLP). Together, these processes enable the evaluation of the safeguarding standards.

Spotlight: Survivor Training – A Lived-Experience Approach to Safeguarding

Safeguarding across Church life continues to evolve, shaped not only by policy and standards but by the voices of those who have lived through harm. This month, we highlight Survivor Training, a UK-based, survivor-led organisation offering faith-informed safeguarding education rooted in experience, empathy, and cultural change.

Beyond Just Words: Survivor Training is founded and led by survivors of abuse who have chosen to transform their experiences into learning for others. Their mission is simple but profound: to bring safeguarding “from the head to the heart”, ensuring that training is not merely procedural but deeply human.

Survivor Training provides a range of programmes designed for clergy, religious, safeguarding personnel, parish volunteers, and faith-based organisations. Their training emphasises:

- Understanding survivor perspectives
- Recognising trauma responses
- Building compassionate safeguarding cultures
- Strengthening listening skills and pastoral sensitivity
- Embedding safeguarding as a core expression of Christian mission

Their approach complements formal safeguarding standards by focusing on the relational, emotional, and cultural dimensions of safety, areas often identified by survivors as needing greater attention.

Survivor-led training is increasingly recognised as a vital component of best practice. It helps Church personnel:

- appreciate the long-term impact of abuse.
- understand how organisational culture can either support or silence survivors.
- reflect on power, trust, and accountability.
- develop safer, more responsive pastoral environments.

Survivor Training’s model aligns strongly with the NBSCCCI’s emphasis on listening, learning, and continuous improvement, and echoes the Church’s commitment to placing the voice of the survivor at the centre of safeguarding.

A Distinctive Contribution

What sets Survivor Training apart is their blend of:

- professional safeguarding knowledge,
- faith-based reflection, and
- authentic survivor narrative.

This combination creates training that is emotionally resonant, spiritually grounded, and practically useful. Participants frequently report that the sessions deepen their understanding of trauma and strengthen their commitment to safeguarding ministry.

Relevance for the Irish Church

As dioceses and religious congregations continue to strengthen safeguarding culture, survivor-led perspectives offer valuable insight. Survivor Training’s approach may support:

- reflective practice for clergy and religious
- formation programmes
- parish safeguarding teams
- ongoing professional development
- trauma-informed pastoral care

Their work encourages all of us to move beyond compliance and towards a culture where safeguarding is lived, felt, and embodied.

Final Reflection

Survivor Training reminds us that safeguarding is not only about preventing harm — it is about honouring the dignity of those who have suffered, learning from their experiences, and ensuring that the Church becomes a place of safety, compassion, and accountability.

Their voice enriches the wider safeguarding landscape, and their contribution is a timely reminder that survivors are not only recipients of safeguarding but essential partners in shaping it.

Find out more about this inspiring organisation at <https://survivortraining.org.uk/>

NATIONAL BOARD ONLINE TRAINING SERIES:

Beyond the Screens

A four-part online training series designed to equip Church personnel with the skills, confidence, and clarity needed to safeguard well in today's digital world.

Four connected sessions to strengthen safeguarding confidence across our Church communities, delivered by Eileen Finnegan of F.S.P.S. (Finnegan Specialist Psychotherapy Service). F.S.P.S. is a specialist therapeutic and forensic intervention service founded by Eileen Finnegan, an extensively trained and highly accredited psychotherapist and supervisor (MIACP, MIAHIP, MEAP, ICP, FTAI). With over thirty years of study and practice, Eileen holds advanced qualifications across systemic/family therapy, humanistic and integrative psychotherapy, Gestalt, child and adolescent psychotherapy, sensory-motor trauma therapy, attachment, and forensic assessment, including a Postgraduate Certificate in A.T.S.O. She is licensed in a wide range of specialist risk-assessment tools, is a former chair of NOTA Ireland, sits on national boards, and lectures at IICP College and UCD.

Session 1 — Safeguarding Foundations in the Digital Age

A clear, accessible introduction to safeguarding online. This session explores how digital communication, social media, and virtual pastoral contact intersect with Church safeguarding standards. Participants gain a grounded understanding of emerging risks, responsibilities, and the principles that guide safe ministry in online spaces.

Session 2 — Digital Communication, Boundaries & Pastoral Practice

This session focuses on maintaining appropriate boundaries when engaging online — whether with children, at risk, parishioners, or colleagues. It examines real-world scenarios, blurred lines, and the practical application of Church policies to email, messaging apps, livestreaming, and virtual meetings. Participants learn how to communicate safely, respectfully, and transparently.

Session 3 — Recognising Online Risk & Responding Effectively

A practical, case-based session that helps participants identify indicators of online harm, including grooming behaviours, coercive control, misinformation, and breaches of confidentiality. It provides clear guidance on reporting concerns, documenting interactions, and applying National Board procedures when safeguarding issues arise in digital contexts.

Session 4 — Building a Safe Digital Culture Across Our Church

The final session moves from compliance to culture. Participants explore how parishes, religious communities, and ministries can model safe digital engagement — from communication guidelines to online meeting etiquette, digital record-keeping, and values-based leadership. The session supports teams to embed safeguarding into everyday digital practice.

The sessions are delivered via Zoom

Session 1 on 4th of November 2026, 3pm to 4pm – Register: [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - Beyond the Screen: Understanding Digital Risk, Grooming and Safeguarding in Faith Communities - Session 1 via Zoom at 3pm-Training Events](#)

Session 2 on 9th of November 2026, 3pm to 4pm – Register: [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - Beyond the Screen: Understanding Digital Risk, Grooming and Safeguarding in Faith Communities - Session 2-Training Events](#)

Session 3 on the 18th of November 2026, 3pm to 4pm – Register: [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - Beyond the Screen: Understanding Digital Risk, Grooming and Safeguarding in Faith Communities - Session 3-Training Events](#)

Session 4 on the 9th of December 2026, 3pm to 4pm – Register: [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - Beyond the Screen: Understanding Digital Risk, Grooming and Safeguarding in Faith Communities - Session 4-Training Events](#)

Each session costs €20. The link will be forwarded in the days before the session.

Unreconciled comes to Dublin this autumn!

Award-winning solo play *Unreconciled* comes to Dublin this autumn for special performances at Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray Wednesday 21 October 2026 and Pavilion Theatre, Dún Laoghaire Tuesday 3 November 2026. Written by Jay Sefton and Mark Basquill and performed by Sefton, *Unreconciled* is a solo tour de force of daring taking audiences on a magic carpet ride through love and bewilderment in a sports-crazed suburb of 1980s Philadelphia. Galvanizing audiences nationally and internationally, the 80-minute production is told with unflinching honesty and surprising humor.

Thirteen-year-old Jay Sefton dreamed of being an actor. He was cast as Jesus in the eighth-grade Passion Play at Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary alongside “a bunch of kids dressed in old sheets and curtains, and some ripped off music from Jesus Christ Superstar,” and directed by the parish priest — later defrocked and named in a grand jury report for sexual abuse of minors.

Hailed by critics and audiences, *Unreconciled* is the winner of the Berkshire Theatre Critics Association Award for Best New Play and Best Solo Performance. The British Theatre Guide praised the production as “laden with powerful, heart-stopping moments.” The National Catholic Reporter calls *Unreconciled*: “Theatre at its finest,” saying it “will make you laugh, think, cry and seethe.”

Through a remarkable solo performance, Sefton transforms the stage into a world of childhood memories, family, faith, humour and pain. “As the show unfurls, Sefton’s transformations dazzle, and the pacing of the production is as precisely mapped as the best poetry.” (America: The Jesuit Review)

The play explores the unique ability of theatre to provide a shared space for difficult conversations. Rather than offering easy answers, *Unreconciled* asks audiences to consider what reconciliation can mean when the past cannot simply be undone. The performances will be followed by post-show panel discussions, featuring award-winning BBC Investigative Journalist Chris Moore in Bray, and One in Four founder, ex-Amnesty International Ireland director and former Senator Colm O’Gorman in Dún Laoghaire.

For Tickets Visit: <https://www.unreconciledtheplay.com/upcoming-performances>

UNRECONCILED
A SOLO PLAY BY JAY SEFTON & MARK BASQUILL

**MERMAID ARTS CENTRE
BRAY, CO. WICKLOW
OCTOBER 21, 2026**
PANEL GUEST: BBC JOURNALIST CHRIS MOORE

**PAVILION THEATRE
DÚN LAOGHAIRE, DUBLIN
NOVEMBER 3, 2026**
GUEST: FORMER SENATOR COLM O'GORMAN

—WINNER—
Outstanding Solo Performance
Outstanding World Premiere
Berkshire Theatre Critics
Association Awards

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Training the Trainer

Our next Train the Trainer course in child safeguarding will take place in January/February 2027. The event requires a minimum of 10 attendees to go ahead.

Location: Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

Attendance at all sessions is required to complete the course.

Dates: Wednesday 20th January, 18:30 - 20:30 via Zoom

Saturday and Sunday, 23rd and 24th January, 09:30 - 16:00 in Person

Wednesday 10th February, 18:30 - 20:30 via Zoom

Saturday and Sunday, 13th and 14th February, 09:30 - 16:00 in Person

The training course is only for those who you wish to become registered trainers for three years with the NBSCCCI. As the Church body, you must appoint and approve any delegate you wish to nominate.

The content of the programme will include:

- Context, Group work skills and facilitation skills.
- Delivering the safeguarding children programme.
- Assessment by a tutor and peers.
- Final assessment by a tutor registered with the NBSCCCI.

Costs

Cost for one attendee: €950

Cost for two attendees from same Diocese/Order: €1500

Cost for three attendees from the same Diocese/Order: €2000

Full price to be paid on completion of the course. Please note the terms and conditions

Terms and Conditions of attendance <https://www.safeguarding.ie/news-events/events>

For those who would like to attend, please email admin@safeguarding.ie for more information.

Pope Leo XIV and the Strengthening of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

In June 2026, Pope Leo XIV approved new Statutes for the Pontifical Commission, marking one of the most significant structural reforms since its establishment.

The new Statutes:

- formally align the Commission with the highest governing bodies of the Roman Curia.
- strengthen its authority to monitor, advise, and evaluate safeguarding practice globally.
- ensure safeguarding is integrated into central Church governance rather than treated as an auxiliary function.
- reinforce expectations that bishops and religious superiors engage proactively with oversight and accountability.

These updates reflect Pope Leo's commitment to ensuring that safeguarding is not peripheral but central to the Church's mission.

Under Pope Leo XIV, the Pontifical Commission has been given:

- greater independence in evaluating safeguarding practice
- direct reporting lines to senior Curial leadership
- expanded authority to advise bishops' conferences and religious congregations
- a clearer mandate to promote safeguarding formation worldwide

The Commission's work now includes developing global standards, supporting local Churches, and ensuring that safeguarding is embedded in seminary formation, governance, and pastoral life.

Follow the work of the Pontifical Commission for the minors at <https://www.tutelaminorum.va/home-2/>



Update on the Historical Cleric Child Abuse (HCCA) Research Programme

The Historical Clerical Child Abuse (HCCA) research programme was commissioned by the Executive Office (TEO) in Northern Ireland to build a clearer, evidence-based understanding of clerical child abuse within faith settings. The work was initiated in response to long-standing calls from victims and survivors for truth-telling, transparency, and meaningful institutional learning. In the survivor component of this research, it is stated that “historical clerical child abuse... refers to neglect, exploitation and physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of the clergy or an individual performing a role related to the ministry of a religious institution/faith group”.

TEO appointed three independent research teams, each selected for their expertise in safeguarding, trauma, governance, and social research. Together, these studies form the most detailed examination of clerical abuse ever undertaken in Northern Ireland.

The Executive Office commissioned the HCCA studies to:

- Strengthen the evidence base on historical clerical child abuse.
- Understand how abuse occurred, including cultural and systemic factors.
- Learn from past failures to improve safeguarding today.
- Ensure survivor voices shape policy, support services, and future safeguarding culture.
- Identify gaps in records, support pathways, and organisational responses.
- Promote transparency and accountability across faith organisations.
- Prevent future harm by embedding learning into safeguarding practice.

The publication of these reports reminds us of our responsibility to listen attentively and keep the voices of victims and survivors at the centre of every safeguarding action. We remain committed to ensuring that all those affected receive compassionate, trauma-informed support, including access to counselling and specialist services.

The reports can be accessed on The Executive Office website: www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/historical-clerical-child-abuse-research-reports

Consultation on Supports and Services to Victims and Survivors of Non-Recent / Historical Institutional Child Abuse

Fiona Ryan is the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (COSICA), appointed in December 2020 for a five-year term. She represents and advocates for people abused as children in Northern Ireland’s residential institutions between 1922 and 1995, as set out in the Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act 2019.

A major consultation led Ms. Ryan in her role was published in February of this year (2026) and examined the current and future support needs of people abused as children in Northern Ireland’s institutions between 1922 and 1995. Survivors highlighted that long-term physical and mental health impacts remain significant decades later.

Key findings include:

- Physical health: 64% reported long-term physical health impacts, and 60% live with chronic conditions such as COPD, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.
- Mental health: 68% described their mental health as poor or very poor, and 30% said they cannot access the support they need. Many survivors feel discomfort seeking medical help due to past trauma.
- Barriers to accessing services: Survivors reported fear of not being believed, shame, and anxiety about retelling traumatic experiences. These barriers often prevent engagement with health and social care services.
- Housing and future care: 34% experienced housing difficulties, and 71% expressed concern about their wellbeing in future residential care.
- Family and relationships: 83% said their childhood experiences had long-term impacts on family relationships.

The consultation emphasises that survivors’ needs are increasing as they age, and that specialist, trauma-informed services must be protected and expanded. Survivors stressed the importance of long-term, reliable support systems that address physical health, mental health, addictions, education, social connection, and practical daily living needs.

To read the full report and more about the work of COSICA <https://www.cosica-ni.org/>



Why Language Matters: Moving from “Historic” to “Non-Recent” Abuse

Adapted from the NSPCC’s “Why Language Matters” blog (3 September 2026)

How we speak about abuse shapes how we understand it and how we respond to those who have lived through it. The term “historic abuse” is widely used across public services, but for many victims and survivors, this language can unintentionally minimise the reality of their ongoing experiences. Childhood abuse does not simply belong to the past; its impact can continue throughout a person’s life, influencing wellbeing, relationships, trust, and safety. The NSPCC now uses the term “non-recent abuse” instead of “historic abuse.” This shift in language is intentional: it acknowledges that while the abuse occurred in the past, its effects are often present, enduring, and deeply felt. Trauma does not follow a neat timeline, and support should not be framed as something that ends once the abuse stops.

Why the Term “Historic” Can Be Harmful

Describing abuse as “historic” risks suggesting that:

- the harm is finished and no longer affects the person.
- the need for support has passed.
- the work of safeguarding professionals is complete.

In reality, healing is often long-term and non-linear. Many adults struggle to speak about their experiences for years, sometimes decades, due to shame, fear, lack of support, or not recognising their experiences as abuse at the time. Some may have tried to disclose as children but were not believed or did not receive an appropriate response. Language that implies distance or closure can make it even harder for people to come forward.

Why “Non-Recent” Is More Trauma-Informed

Using “non-recent abuse” helps professionals:

- recognise the ongoing impact of childhood trauma.
- validate the experiences of victims and survivors.
- encourage disclosures without fear of being dismissed.
- maintain focus on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults who may still be at risk.
- build trust and psychological safety in pastoral and support settings.

It also reinforces that the responsibility to respond compassionately and appropriately does not diminish with time.

Respecting Individual Language Choices

While organisations may adopt trauma-informed terminology, individuals may choose different words to describe their own experiences. Sensitivity to personal preference is essential.

The NSPCC in their blog post note that many adults prefer the term “victim and survivor” or “victims/survivors,” reflecting guidance from the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

Implications for Church Safeguarding

For safeguarding personnel across the Church, language is not a technical detail; it is part of our pastoral response. Using “non-recent abuse” aligns with trauma-informed practice, supports survivor engagement, and reinforces our commitment to listening, learning, and responding with compassion.

As we continue to strengthen safeguarding culture, adopting sensitive and accurate language is one small but meaningful step in honouring the lived and living experiences of those who have suffered harm.

Source: Adapted from the NSPCC’s Why Language Matters blog, “Talking about ‘non-recent’ instead of ‘historic’ abuse,” published 3 September 2026.

Commission of Investigation: Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools.

The Commission of Investigation into Historical Sexual Abuse in Schools launched its official website in August 2026. The site provides clear information on the Commission’s purpose, its legal basis under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, and the background of the Scoping Inquiry that led to its creation. It displays details about the Chair, Mr Justice Michael MacGrath, outlines the Commission’s work programme, and explains how survivors, former pupils, staff, and members of the public can engage with the process. The website also hosts updates, documents, and guidance on how to submit information once the Commission’s Survivor Engagement Programme opens.

It should be noted that Aidan Godron, CEO of the NBSCCCI, has written to the Chair of the Commission asking that the contact details for Towards Healing and Towards Peace be included on the Victim/Survivor support section of the website.

For further updates please see

<https://www.commissionofinvestigation.ie/>

New Guidance on AI-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material (AI-CSAM)

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's Online Safety Committee, working in partnership with the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), has released an important new resource to support professionals in responding to the emerging risks posed by AI-generated child sexual abuse material (AI-CSAM).

This guidance is specifically designed for those working with children and young people in Northern Ireland, and addresses the urgent and rapidly evolving threat created by AI technologies capable of generating abusive imagery. The document provides clear, practical advice to help professionals recognise AI-CSAM, understand how it is produced, and respond appropriately when concerns arise.

A key message from the SBNI, NCA and IWF is that AI-generated child sexual abuse material must be treated with the same seriousness, urgency and safeguarding response as any other form of CSAM. Although the images may be artificially generated, the harm is real — both in terms of exploitation risk and the impact on children whose likenesses may be used without consent.

The resource reinforces:

- the importance of early identification.
- clear reporting pathways.
- multi-agency cooperation.
- the need for ongoing professional awareness as technology continues to develop.

We are grateful to our colleagues in the SBNI Online Safety Committee for their leadership in this area and for sharing this guidance with safeguarding partners across the island. Their work supports all of us in strengthening our collective response to digital risks and ensuring that children and young people remain safe in an increasingly complex online environment.

Developments in the Republic of Ireland on AI-Generated Harmful Content.

Safeguarding partners in the Republic of Ireland are also responding to the growing risks posed by AI-generated harmful content, including AI-generated child sexual abuse material (AI-CSAM). Several national bodies have issued guidance, statements, and recommendations that mirror the concerns raised by our colleagues in the SBNI.

Irish Internet Hotline (Hotline.ie)

Hotline.ie, Ireland's national reporting centre for illegal online content, has issued multiple statements and guidance pieces addressing AI-generated harmful imagery. Their 2025–2026 publications highlight concerns about:

- AI-generated intimate images.
- AI “nudify” apps.
- the risk of AI being used to create or manipulate CSAM.

Hotline.ie emphasises that any material depicting a child in explicit or sexualised ways — whether AI-generated or not — is illegal under Irish law, including the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998.

New Research Highlights Risks of Online Self-Harm Content for Young People

A major study from the University of Oxford has provided one of the most detailed insights to date into how children and young people encounter self-harm content online — and the safeguarding implications this presents for families, schools, and all those working with young people.

The OxWell Student Survey, involving 32,102 students aged 11–18 years across England, examined exposure to self-harm content and the associated psychosocial risks. The findings are stark: one-third of students (34.5%) reported seeing self-harm content online in the previous month, with most exposure occurring unintentionally and often delivered through algorithm-driven feed suggestions.

Key Findings from the OxWell Study

1. High Levels of Exposure

More than one in three young people reported recent exposure to self-harm content. This includes images, videos, text posts, and discussions that normalise, encourage, or visually depict self-harm.

2. Mostly Unintentional

The majority of exposure was not actively sought out. Instead, content appeared through:

- algorithmic recommendations
- trending posts
- platform “suggested for you” feeds
- reposts by peers

This highlights the role of platform design in shaping risk.

Implications for Safeguarding Practice

For Church safeguarding personnel, youth ministers, and pastoral workers, the OxWell findings underline several priorities:

- Recognise online exposure as a safeguarding concern, even when accidental.
- Create safe spaces where young people can talk about what they see online.
- Be alert to algorithm-driven risks, especially for vulnerable young people.
- Strengthen partnerships with parents, schools, and statutory services.
- Promote help-seeking, ensuring young people know where to turn for support.

The research also highlights the importance of early intervention, as online self-harm content can escalate distress quickly.

To read more about this <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:4ae0b3ec-afc8-41a0-97fb-b1f04038e26c/files/rcr56n363r>

Why This Matters for the Church

Young people in our parishes, schools, and communities are navigating digital environments that can amplify vulnerability. The OxWell study provides evidence that online self-harm content is not a niche issue; it is widespread, often unseen by adults, and closely linked to emotional wellbeing.

Safeguarding today requires attentiveness not only to physical and relational environments, but also to the digital spaces where young people spend much of their time.

The NBSCCCI will continue to monitor emerging research and share resources to support safe, informed, and compassionate responses.

The proposed EU Kids Act directly builds on, and is heavily shaped by, the work of Prof. Jörg M. Fegert, who co-chairs the EU's Special Panel on Child Safety Online. His panel's scientific recommendations form the evidence base and policy logic behind the Act. The NBSCCCI are pleased to welcome Prof. Dr Jörg M. Fegert to a Zoom session with Church Leaders and Safeguarding leads, where he will summarise the report on the 7th October at 1 pm. For more information, contact acunningham@safeguarding.ie

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EU Kids Act – What we Need to Know

The EU Kids Act is a major new proposal from the European Commission aimed at making digital spaces safer for children and teenagers across Europe. It introduces EU-wide age rules, strong safety-by-design requirements, and new responsibilities for tech platforms to protect young users.

1. Clear Age Rules for Social Media Access

- Under 13: No social media accounts allowed. Children may only access child-friendly video services through a parent's account.
- Ages 13–14: Access only through parent-supervised "mini accounts" with strict limits (daily time cap of 1 hour, parental approval of contacts).
- Age 15+: Young people may open their own accounts, but platforms must be safe by design.

This "staircase" approach gives children gradual access as they mature, while ensuring platforms are built with safety at their core.

2. Safety-by-Design Requirements

Platforms used by minors—including social media, video-sharing sites, online games, AI chatbots and companions—must:

- Remove addictive design features (infinite scroll, reward tricks, push notifications during sleep).
- Ensure private profiles by default.
- Block unsolicited contact from strangers.
- Turn AI chatbots/companions off by default, and prohibit designs that create emotional dependency.

3. Age Verification & Parental Tools

Platforms must use privacy-preserving age assurance tools to verify users' ages. Parents will have clearer controls to manage access, screen time, and content.

4. Stronger Enforcement

The Act reverses the burden of proof: Platforms—especially very large ones—must prove their services are safe for children before offering them. Fast-track investigations (90 days) can be launched when risks are identified.

5. Why It Matters

The Act responds to evidence that children face significant risks online, including cyberbullying, addictive platform design, harmful content, and unsafe AI interactions. Experts describe it as the most significant child online safety legislation ever proposed at EU level.