

# Newsletter

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

## ALERT BOX

This part of the Newsletter is designed to draw the attention of Church authorities to important developments outlined below:

Induction of *Safe and Welcoming Church – Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024* – revision of Child Safeguarding Policy: ..... page 2

Reporting allegations against deceased respondents: ..... page 3

## Introduction

March 2024

### National Office Staff

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

Chief Executive Officer  
[Teresa Devlin](#)

Director of Training and Support  
[Lyn McDermott](#)

Part time Director of Safeguarding  
[Peter Kieran](#)

Administrators  
[Imelda Ashe](#)

[Ann Cunningham](#)

Advice and Support  
Sister Colette Stevenson

Spring has arrived and with it, lots of new growth and changes.

Within the National Board, there are many changes. We have said our farewell to Niall Moore, former Director of Training and Support, and wished him well in his new role in the Church of Ireland.

In Niall's place, we have appointed Lyn McDermott who takes up post on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Lyn has extensive experience as a trainer and in formulating policy in statutory and voluntary sector settings, and she has already proven her commitment and enthusiasm for working in the National Board. We wish her many years of positive engagement in our joint efforts to make the Catholic Church a safe place for children.

We now must say adieu to our Director of Safeguarding, Peter Kieran as he moves on gracefully into retirement. Peter has been a stalwart in the National Office for 12 years, working quietly on Reviews, research and every other task I have allocated to him. Those who know Peter know that when you go to him for advice you will receive a well-considered, evidence-based written response. The National Board will miss him.

As you also know, I soon will leave my post as CEO, and I am delighted to be replaced by Aidan Gordon. Aidan has many years' experience in social work in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. For the last 9 years, Aidan has worked as Director of Safeguarding in the Archdiocese of Armagh. He brings with him knowledge and skills in a range of safeguarding roles. We wish Aidan best wishes, as he takes on the role of CEO.

In spite of the changes, the work continues and we have started 2024 with renewed energy. Already we are planning the induction sessions for the revised safeguarding policy, *A Safe and Welcoming Church – Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*. You will find all the details below. We organised a Train the Trainers course over three weekends, and want to pass on our good wishes to all the new trainers who attended the course. We are also completing a number of Reviews of religious congregations.

This Newsletter provides information on:

- Induction Training for *A Safe and Welcoming Church – Policy and standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*
- Lay Associations of the Faithful
- Reporting Allegations against Deceased Personnel to Tusla
- Annual Self-audits and Training Returns
- Changes to Church Authorities
- National Board Reviews of Safeguarding Practice in Dioceses
- Practice Issue – Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Safeguarding Children
- Resources

# Induction Training – A Safe and Welcoming Church – Child Safeguarding Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024.

In December 2023, The Irish Bishops Conference (IEC) and the Association of Missionary and Religious Leaders of Ireland (AMRI) agreed to adopt the revised safeguarding policy that the National Board with others have been working on for the last year. The revised policy is embedded in Catholic social teaching and in Children’s Rights. The new policy contains all the core elements of the previous 2016 policy, now captured under three Standards:

- **Governance and Leadership**
- **Embedding a culture of Safeguarding**
- **Responding with care and compassion**

Each standard has a number of indicators to assist in guiding us towards implementation of the standard.

In order to assist in understanding the policy and your role in living it out, the National Board will host a series of induction training events as follows:

March 25, 12.00pm **FULLY BOOKED** (Congregations only) AMRI Offices

March 25, 6.00pm **FULLY BOOKED** (Columba Centre, Maynooth)

March 26, 10.00am (Renehan Hall, Maynooth)

April 9, 2.00pm (Maldron Hotel, Oranmore, Galway)

April 9, 7.30pm (Maldron Hotel, Oranmore, Galway)

April 10, 3.00pm (Springfort Hotel, Mallow, County Cork)

April 15, 10.00am (Cardinal O Fiaich Library, Armagh)

April 16, 10.00am (Lisbreen, Somerton Road, Belfast)

April 16, 2.00pm (Lisbreen, Somerton Road, Belfast)

April 17, 6.00pm (Knock House Hotel, Mayo)

April 18, 10.00am (Knock House Hotel, Mayo)

April 22, 6.00pm (Anner Hotel, Dublin Road, Thurles)

April 23, 10.00am (Anner Hotel, Dublin Road, Thurles)

April 30, 7.00pm (An Grianan Hotel, Speenoge, Burt, County Donegal)

May 2, 2.00pm (Cathedral Parish Centre, College Street, Carlow)

It is important that the following attend the induction training: Church Authorities – Bishops and Religious Leaders; Directors of Safeguarding/Safeguarding Co-ordinators; DLPs; Priest Advisors; Complainant Support Persons; Safeguarding Committee members; and all others who have safeguarding responsibilities in Dioceses and Religious Orders across Ireland.

To register please click on this link: [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - Events](#)

## Lay Associations of the Faithful

The National Board produced detailed guidance on external groups who may minister within a Church body. This guidance sets out the responsibilities on all to ensure that children are safe. A Bishop or Religious leader must be satisfied that those who minister in their Church body are – as far as possible - safe to do so, and that there are good safeguards in place to ensure that the ministry is safe and welcoming to children. There are significant differences in terms of responsibilities for Church leaders who allow external groups to use their property. For example, a sports club, and external groups who are in communion with the Church.

Of particular note are Lay Associations of the Faithful who undertake tremendous positive ministry with children. Some Lay Associations may wish to avail of the services of, and seek to become an associate member of the National Board.

In order for Associations of the Faithful to become associate members of the National Board, there must be agreement by the Sponsoring Bodies and the National Board.

The application process requires the following:

The lead person within the Lay Association should write to the appropriate sponsoring body (IEC or AMRI), outlining how they fulfil the following criteria:

- How the ministry follows the ethos of the Church, or the charism of a Religious Institute or Society of Apostolic Life that is a member of AMRI.
- Hold statutes, which are approved, or at least recognised by a competent ecclesiastical authority.
- Hold statutes that include governance and accountability mechanisms.
- Have insurance for children's activities, including personal indemnity insurance.

## Reporting Allegations against Deceased Personnel to Tusla

You will all be aware of the recent Court of Appeal Judgement [McGrath v HSE (mandated reporting case) dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024], which declared,

*That upon its proper construction, s.14 (1)(a) of the 2015 Act does not require mandated persons to report to the Child and Family Agency a knowledge, belief, or suspicion, that a person now an adult, was as a child harmed within the meaning of the Act, save where such knowledge, belief, or suspicion leads to knowledge, belief, or a suspicion on the part of the mandated person that a person currently a child within the meaning of the Act, has been, is being, or is at risk of being harmed.*

In light of this judgement, National Board advice is that there is **NO** need to report allegations against deceased personnel.

The National Board has engaged with Tusla on this and understands that they are currently in the process of amending several policy and procedural documents, including: A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns; Information for mandated persons in Tusla and A guide for policy, procedure and practice, along with training and video materials. It is their hope to have revised documents on the Tusla website within 4 weeks.

## Reporting Allegations against Deceased Personnel to HSCT

Following consultation with the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, It has been confirmed there is **NO** need to report allegations against deceased personnel to HSCT.

## Training Returns

All training returns need to be in by the end of March 2024. These should be completed online by registered trainers. Registered trainers can do this by:

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

You can 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 login or have forgotten your user name and password please contact [acunningham@safeguarding.ie](mailto:acunningham@safeguarding.ie)*

## Annual Self Audits

The self-audit provides an opportunity for a Church authority to review what is working well and what needs to improve in child safeguarding within their Church body. For those who have ministry with children or are managing cases, the annual self-audit should be completed and the National Board notified of its completion by the end of March 2024.

If you have received confirmation from the National Board that you are exempt from the self-audit process, there is no need to send in a report to the National Board. If you are unsure, please contact [imeldaashe@safeguarding.ie](mailto:imeldaashe@safeguarding.ie) to check whether a self-audit for your Church body is required.

## Inquiries

### **Northern Ireland Inquiry on Clerical Abuse**

A new independent chair of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Historical Clerical Child Abuse has been appointed. Lisa Caldwell took up this post in November 2023. Following the Group's work on Mother and Baby Homes/ Magdalene Laundries, future work will focus on Historical Clerical Child Abuse. Mother and Baby Homes/ Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse fell outside of the Terms of Reference of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry which dealt with historical abuse of children in residential institutions between 1922 and 1995. The group are working on research to help understand the nature and prevalence of Historical Clerical Child Abuse (HCCA) in Northern Ireland. Development of tender documents for research projects is now underway.

### **Scoping Inquiry – Republic of Ireland**

Mary O'Toole, Chair of the Scoping Inquiry has indicated a timeframe of June 2024 for completion of her work on scoping the extent of child abuse in Boarding Schools to inform the government's response to revelations of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders.

# Changes to Church Authorities

The National Board 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](mailto:admin@safeguarding.ie).

## National Board Reviews of Safeguarding Practice in Dioceses

All diocese have engaged in an external review by the National Board and all Review Reports have now been posted on the National Board website. An overview report of compliance with the Church's standards has also been produced and it can be read in full at [National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - National Board Publications](#)

The first round of reviews measured compliance with the earlier Standards of 2008. Therefore, direct comparisons between the two series of Reviews are not possible; they each sought evidence on different aspects of safeguarding, and their purposes were distinct.

Included in the overview report are the following findings:

- Eighteen (18) of the twenty-six (26) dioceses met all seven 2016 Standards, which is both commendable and heartening.
- The combined number of recommendations made to dioceses arising from the earlier reviews was two hundred and ten (210), while the current round of reviews led to ten (10) recommendations being made. A recommendation this time around is only made in the event of a diocese not meeting a standard.
- Of the 210 recommendations previously made to diocesan bishops, 202 were fully implemented. It is a matter for each individual bishop to decide whether to implement or not any recommendation made to him, as the National Board cannot compel that its advice be followed.
- The second round of reviews enabled greater input from bishops at the planning stage, and as a result, the approach adopted varied to take account of the specific focus that each bishop wanted to take. This has led to some difference in the detail and length of Review Reports.
- Pre-fieldwork meetings, most often via Zoom, helped significantly in the preparation of the Review fieldwork visits.
- While Covid-19 led to Review fieldwork sometimes being split and conducted over longer periods, all diocesan Reviews measured compliance against each of the seven Standards.

The Dioceses in which Reviews have been completed and reports issued since April 2023 are:

- Down and Connor
- Dromore
- Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora
- Waterford and Lismore

Reports of all these Reviews can be read at:

[National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland - National Board Publications](#)



## Contact Details

National Office for  
Safeguarding Children  
New House  
St. Patrick's College  
Maynooth  
Co. Kildare

T : 00 353 (01)5053124  
F : 00 353 (01) 5053026

# Practice Issue

## Artificial Intelligence and Safeguarding Children

*Evil begins when you begin to treat people as things* (Terry Pratchett, 1948-2015)

The international *Safer Internet Day* is held every February. The date for the 2024 event was February 6. The theme for this year's day was 'Tech in our World'. The National Board is aware of the benefits and threats of technology, and is concerned about the potential harms to children that arise as soon as new and potentially beneficial developments in information technology are achieved. In a March 2023 article headed, *How AI is leading the fight against online child abuse* (<https://emerging-europe.com/news/how-ai-is-leading-the-fight-against-online-child-abuse/>), Emerging Europe stated that,

'The widespread availability of information technologies such as social media and messaging apps has created unprecedented opportunities for communication and collaboration. However, these same technologies have also facilitated the spread of dangerous content such as misinformation, hate speech, and extremist propaganda.

They have also created a space that facilitates the spread of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM).'

This is what has happened, as reported in the Irish Examiner in recent articles - *Artificial intelligence drives hike in computer-generated child abuse images* (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41312431.html>), and *Ireland 'not doing enough' to protect children from AI dangers* (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41331190.html>).

The Emerging Europe article ends on a more positive note in stating that,

'Law enforcement officers using the technologies have confirmed to us that AI is already contributing to the fight against online child sexual exploitation and abuse by, for instance, cutting investigation times... According to members of our network that have first-hand experience with these tools, the time spent on analysing child abuse images and videos that used to take one to two weeks can now be done in one day. AI tools have also helped with backlogs, significantly cutting forensic backlogs from over 1.5 years down to four to six months. This can make a world of difference for victims.'

And there *are* victims, even if there is no physical contact. The ways in which children can be and are being abused may and will change, so our approaches to their safeguarding have to keep pace.

## Resources

The National Board's Guidance and Practice (GAP) papers 3 and 12 focus on the needs of complainants / victims / survivors of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. While the small team in the National Office does not have a service remit for this constituency, the Church bodies whose work they support certainly do.

One organisation working on the other side of the world in Australia is the **Blue Knot Foundation**, and it describes its mission in the following words,

Blue Knot provides information and support for anyone who is affected by complex trauma. Complex trauma is repeated, ongoing, and often extreme interpersonal trauma (between people) – violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation experienced as a child, young person and adult. (<https://blueknot.org.au/>)

Blue Knot's website has a dedicated Resource section at <https://blueknot.org.au/resources/>, which contains Fact Sheets, Videos, Newsletters, Recommended Reading, and a wide variety of statistical data and other relevant information.

Blue Knot's *Breaking Free* electronic newsletter is published at least 10 times annually, and individuals can sign up to receive this high quality information source at <https://blueknot.org.au/resources/newsletters/>