



NEWSLETTER

Healing, Accountability and Action: Conference reflections

IN SEPTEMBER 2025, church leaders, survivors, safeguarding professionals and academics gathered in Athlone for the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (‘the National Board’) biannual conference. The event was a further step in the Church’s ongoing journey toward healing, justice, and reform.

Held at the Sheraton Hotel in Athlone, the conference built on the theme first introduced in a National Board 2023 paper: “Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice model of engaging with victims and survivors in the Catholic Church in Ireland”.

Over three days, participants listened to powerful testimonies, insightful presentations, had opportunities to discuss and imagine pathways forward.

One of the most striking aspects of the conference was the centring of survivors’ voices. People who had experienced harm within the



*Archbishop
Luis Mariano
Montemayor,
Apostolic
Nuncio to
Ireland,
opening the
Conference*

Church shared their stories – not only of pain, but of resilience and hope. Their testimonies highlighted the need for a Church that listens humbly, acknowledges wrongdoing, and takes concrete steps to make reparations. For many attendees, hearing directly from survivors, and their full and welcomed participation in the conference was the most impactful experience of the three days. The focus was not about revisiting past failures.

Rather, the dialogue emphasised the importance of ongoing engagement – a relationship-based approach to justice in which the Church remains accountable, not just legally or procedurally, but personally and spiritually.

Dr Pat Jones of Durham University delivered a thought-provoking presentation on “Becoming a Restorative Church”, drawing on the findings of her Durham Centre

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Hearing from survivors was impactful for many attendees

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for Catholic Studies' Boundary-Breaking research. Her talk centred on the Cross of the Moment report, a four-year study involving interviews with survivors, clergy, lay faithful and bishops which explores how certain aspects of Catholic culture, especially clericalism, have contributed to both the harm done and the Church's problematic responses.

Dr Jones emphasised that becoming a truly restorative Church requires far more than improved procedures – it demands a cultural and spiritual transformation. In her presentation, she highlighted three essential commitments for any institution seeking to respond ethically and compassionately to abuse. First, the Church must

recognise the truth of what has happened, acknowledge the harm done, and accept accountability, not defensively or selectively, but with openness and integrity. Second, she stressed the importance of involving people who are willing and able to answer victims' and survivors' questions, ideally from within the institutions where the abuse occurred, so that real dialogue and transparency can take place. Thirdly, she underscored the necessity of enabling proper redress or reparation, offering whatever forms of care, support, or repair are possible and needed in each individual case. Dr Jones framed these steps as both practical actions and theological imperatives, concrete ways the Church can move from remorse to meaningful

restoration, and to a future shaped by truth, justice, and healing.

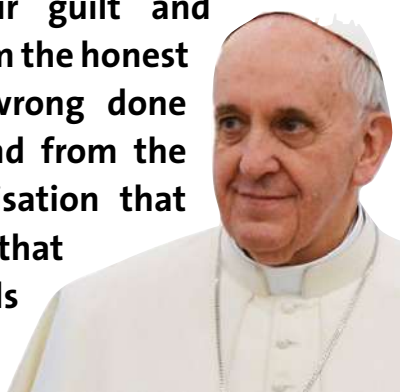
In her presentation, Prof Marie Keenan (UCD) offered a compelling vision for transforming justice responses to non-recent institutional abuse, particularly within the Catholic Church. Drawing on her co-authored research, she argued that traditional legal mechanisms (such as inquiries and redress schemes) often fall short of meeting survivors' needs, because they fail to meaningfully engage with the structural and relational dimensions of abuse. She proposed a hybrid model rooted in restorative, transitional, and transformative justice, in which accountability is not only legal or moral, but also relational and ideological. Prof. Keenan stressed the importance of trauma-informed processes, accessible truth-seeking (such as non-adversarial investigations), and meaningful redress, including apologies and reparative dialogue, that bridge the gap between survivors and the Church. Her framework, she suggested, offers the Church a path toward genuine responsibility and healing, grounded in listening, structural reform, and sustained engagement.

In their respective presentations, the Jesuits, Spiritans, and the survivor-led group Restore Now

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From Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos, He Loved Us*

“Reparation, if it is to be Christian, to touch the offended person’s heart and not be a simple act of commutative justice, presupposes two demanding things: acknowledging our guilt and asking forgiveness... It is from the honest acknowledgment of the wrong done to our brother or sister, and from the profound and sincere realisation that love has been compromised, that the desire to make amends arises”. (Paragraph 187)



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outlined the restorative justice processes that have been developed within their communities. The Jesuits described their two-year facilitated programme which created safe spaces for survivors to share their experiences, receive acknowledgment of harm, and access therapeutic supports and redress. The Spiritans explained their commitment to a non-adversarial restorative pathway, offering survivors structured opportunities for dialogue and meaningful repair. Restore Now contributed a vital survivor and advocacy perspective, emphasising the importance of transparent communication, sustained listening, and collaborative design of restorative processes that centre survivors' needs and voices.

At the heart of the conference was the message that safeguarding and care of survivors is not merely procedural or an institutional concern – it is at the core of Christian discipleship. This means integrating safeguarding in

every level of Church life: from parish ministry and liturgy to religious formation and governance. It also means continued investment in training, resources, and pastoral care that can support the needs of survivors long-term. A key message from the speakers emphasised the need for the Church to genuinely repent – not only in words, but in structures, and to include providing meaningful opportunities for restitution and repair.

While the tone in Athlone was hopeful, participants did not shy away from acknowledging the challenges. Transformative justice work requires courage: Church leaders must be willing to yield power, change systems, and accept uncomfortable truths. Financial and human-resource constraints remain real concerns for dioceses and religious orders. Lasting change demands sustained commitment. ■

Looking Forward: Key Take-Away Messages

1. Survivor-led Engagement: The voices of those harmed must remain central. Their experiences should shape policy, practice, and pastoral care.

2. Restorative & Transitional Justice: Models from post-conflict societies offer valuable tools for healing, accountability, and institutional reform.

3. Embedding Safeguarding in Church Life: Safeguarding should be embedded in the culture and practices of the Church and its ministries.

4. Long-Term Commitment: True reform will require resources, courage, and sustained engagement.

A warm welcome to Sarah Healy

ON OCTOBER 13 LAST, Sarah Healy joined the team as the new administrator of the Child Safeguarding & Protection Service. Sarah has many years of experience in business and most recently worked in human relations in a nursing home run by an order of nuns. Happily, Sarah has experience of vetting. Sarah hit the ground running and, with very little induction training, got stuck into working alongside Vivienne Knight, our vetting coordinator. Between them, they have considerably reduced the number

of vetting applications awaiting processing.

Sarah will be involved in all aspects of the work of CSPPS. She will assist in the management of complaints and allegations of abuse and will assist Deirdre Donnelly and Andrew Fagan in their work supporting adult victims and survivors of child abuse. She may also assist in the organisation of safeguarding training, if time allows.

We are delighted to welcome Sarah to our team and we hope she will be very happy working for the Archdiocese. ■



Sarah Healy

Changes to vetting procedure are part of EU-wide initiative

THE NATIONAL Vetting Bureau introduced changes to the vetting procedure in July 2025 as part of a European Union initiative to combat sexual abuse and exploitation of children. They extend the checks carried on those for whom vetting is being sought (the 'vetting subject') to all 27 EU countries, as well as the UK. Vetting subjects for roles with children who previously lived in an EU member state or the UK will now be required to provide more detailed information. The changes, while welcome, place extra demands on those organisations, such as schools and parishes, who apply for vetting for those with roles for which vetting is required. They also place extra demands on the diocesan vetting service. These extra demands have increased the amount of time taken to process applications.

For vetting subjects, that is, those for whom vetting is being sought, there is a new NVB1 to be filled up. It is available on the diocesan website. All old versions of the NVB1 should now be destroyed as they will no longer be accepted.

For those applying for vetting, that is, those organisations that require to have people vetted in order that they can work with the organisation, they are now required to verify the identity of the vetting subject. This is not a new requirement, but

it is now being strictly enforced. Vetting subjects must present themselves in person for verification of identity and address. The verification process can only be carried out by those who have undergone training. The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland has developed an online training programme for those who will be carrying out verification of identity for applicant organisations.

Verification of identity requires that the vetting subject produce valid photo identification such as a passport or driving license. An Irish Certificate of Naturalisation or an EU identity card is also acceptable. Proof of current address is also re-

quired. A bank or credit card statement, a utility bill, a letter from a government department or a letter from a local authority confirming residence are all acceptable provided they were issued within six months of the date given on the NVB1 form and the address is the same as that given on the form. This requirement has caused difficulty for some. An affidavit from a solicitor will also suffice. There is a cost involved but it should not be more than €10.

For vetting subjects coming from overseas the application process can be initiated before they arrive in the country. The person verifying their identity can do so during a video call provided the vetting subject is visible to them, along with an identifying document, such as a passport. Scanned documents can then be sent by the vetting subject and used to initiate the vetting application. However, this must be followed up by in-person identity verification prior to the commencement of relevant work (that is, the work for which vetting is required).

Enquiries can be sent to garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie. We will endeavour to deal with your query as quickly as possible but please be aware that we are receiving a very high number of queries at this time. All completed applications should be submitted by email to vetting.processing@dublindiocese.ie.

How to get in touch with the CSPS team

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You can call the CSPS team at 01 8360314

Vetting enquiries and applications should be submitted to garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie