



# NEWSLETTER

## BUILDING HOPE

In March of this year Archbishop Farrell established a Task Force on a 'Church for the Dublin of Tomorrow' under the title Building Hope. The Task Force is made of clergy, religious and lay people. Archbishop Farrell has asked the Task Force to "prepare an approach to a pastoral strategy that supports parish communities of faith to undertake a radical renewal, looking to the future with creativity". The Task Force has engaged in a wide ranging consultation to gather in the views of as many people as possible about the future of the Diocese. A report will be prepared and presented to Archbishop Farrell at the end of the Summer.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee decided that it would like to contribute to the debate about the future of the Archdiocese of Dublin. The Committee would like to address the concerns some parents may have about the involvement of their children in parish activities. Acknowledging that we live in a more secular society now than in the past and that many parents do not wish to raise their children in the Catholic faith, the Committee is also aware, based on feedback from some young parents who have attended safeguarding training, that some parents worry about whether or not it is safe to allow their children to be involved in activities run by the Church. Given our past failings in this area, such worries are understandable.

It is difficult to see any future for the Church in Dublin unless children are encouraged to become involved in it from an early age. That can only happen when we provide assurance for parents that their children will be looked after and protected from harm when they are participating in Church activities. It is not enough that our safeguarding is of a high standard, though it cannot be less than that. It also has to be clear to people that our safeguarding is of a high standard. For that reason the Safeguarding Committee consider that communicating



our safeguarding message has to be a priority as we go forward into the future. This Newsletter is part of that, as is Safeguarding Sunday which has now become an annual event on the fourth Sunday in September. In the future, we would like to explore other ways of highlighting the work we do to safeguard children and vulnerable adults. One proposal is to make some short videos/ films that could be put up on parish websites.

In launching Building Hope Archbishop Farrell called for dialogue and engagement. The Church of the future will be a synodal Church. "Every member of the Church" he said "starting with the young will participate in this synodal practice which henceforth will be part of the life of the Church". That implies that developing our safeguarding practice in the Diocese will be done in consultation with those we wish to protect from harm, children and vulnerable adults, and in partnership with parents and guardians.

The Child Safeguarding and Protection Service has a number of functions. One of them is to support those working in our parishes and diocesan offices, whether lay, cleric or religious, to enable them to do the work of evangelisation and faith formation with confidence. In order to do so we will:

- Work with parishes and diocesan organisations to help them understand and implement safeguarding measures in a manner that takes account of the many demands being made of diocesan clergy;
- Work with other organisations, including the statutory authorities, to ensure, as far as possible, that national and Church policies in areas such as vetting are easily understood and implemented;
- Be accessible and available to those working in parishes and diocesan organisations to offer advice and assistance as required;
- Work in partnership with parishes and diocesan organisations both as an end in itself that is compatible with a synodal model of Church and as a means of promoting such an approach to safeguarding within parishes and diocesan organisations.

In a recent contribution to our understanding of safeguarding (discussed further below) Dr Ethna Regan discussed two aspects of safeguarding. One is relatively well defined. It encompasses our legal obligations and focuses on protection from abuse. The second is broader and is about our moral responsibility to remove barriers to children's well-being and flourishing. Both aspects are necessary, Dr Regan argues, neither is sufficient on its own. Safeguarding, thus understood, is not something separate from the work of ministry. Archbishop Farrell reminds us that all of us: clergy, religious and lay people are called to share in the mission and ministry of the Church. Safeguarding is integral to such ministry.

## THEOLOGY OF SAFEGUARDING

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland is promoting the development of a theology of safeguarding. It asked nine people to address safeguarding issues in short videos that are posted on its website:

<https://www.safeguarding.ie/national-conference-2021>

Dr Ethna Regan is Associate Professor in Ethics and Theology in Dublin City University and she addresses the issue of how an understanding of children's rights can inform a theology of safeguarding.



Human rights, Dr Regan argues, focus on what we need to be protected from, provided with and participate in, in order to flourish as human beings. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes the rights of children in these categories, that is:

- Protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- Provision of services to promote children's survival and development;
- Participation in decisions that affect children and society, in accordance with their age and stage of development.

Four principles underpin the Convention. These are:

1. Non-discrimination;
2. The principle that the best interests of the child should be upheld when decisions are being made that affect them;
3. The right to life, survival and development;
4. Respect for the views of the child.

Dr Regan highlights the work of the German theologian, Karl Rahner, who wrote about the theology of childhood. He argued that children are subjects with rights and that childhood should not be regarded simply as a stage on the way to adulthood. She also quotes Archbishop Martino on the occasion of the ratification of the Convention by the Holy See. He said: "one must keep in mind that the rights of the child are not a concession granted by governments or by the adults of the human family, they are inherent in the child's nature; and the purpose of legislation is to recognise and uphold them to the fullest".

Since the Second Vatican Council human rights has emerged as a major theme in the social documents of the Church but the Church's credibility in this area has been undermined by failures in the responses to the victims of abuse within the Church. Dr Regan reflects that the recent history of the Catholic Church might have been very different if it had implemented the Convention it ratified in 1990.

Dr Regan reminds us that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. She argues that a rights based approach can help us to address the harm that was done to people who were abused in a Church context and to challenge the barriers to the well-being and flourishing of children in the Church.

## THE DIOCESAN SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE

This committee was established in 2013. It is made of clerics, religious and lay people. Frances Stephenson is the Chair. Frances is a Parish Safeguarding Representative in Kilquade and an accredited Safeguarding trainer. Frances has a long history of involvement in safeguarding in the Diocese and has been a friend and supporter of the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service for many years.



The Safeguarding Committee advises the Archbishop on the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and vulnerable adults in the parishes and diocesan organisations of Dublin Diocese. It has a particular focus on ensuring that diocesan safeguarding policy is implemented across all of the 197 parishes in the Diocese and, to this end, it draws up a strategic plan every three years. The Safeguarding Committee monitors the implementation of this plan on a regular basis.

The Safeguarding Committee works closely with the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service (CSPS).

## CSPS TEAM CONTACTS

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In keeping with government guidelines, the staff team are working from home. The main office number, 01 8360314, is diverted so that calls to the office will be picked up by a member of the team. If your call is not picked up immediately we will respond to any message you leave within one working day.

Vetting enquiries and applications can be submitted online to: [garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie](mailto:garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie)

## VETTING UPDATE

As many readers will remember, in 2010 and 2011, a team from Boston Diocese visited Dublin and examined our approach to safeguarding and child protection as part of an Apostolic Visitation that had been announced by Pope Benedict in his pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland in March 2010. The team from Boston spent a number of weeks here over a period of months. It was a positive and constructive engagement from which we, in the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service, learned a great deal.

Around this time, we were writing our diocesan safeguarding policy document. The team from Boston took a close interest in this document and they urged us to include in it a specific commitment that any person found to have abused a child would not be permitted to minister in the Diocese. We followed their advice. This was one of the drivers behind our policy of having all of our volunteers vetted. When the vetting legislation was introduced in 2016, we had to amend our policy because the legislation did not allow for 'blanket vetting'. It was and continues to be our policy to have as many of our volunteers as possible vetted. Most particularly, we wish to vet all those who minister in public. People who do so are seen as persons in good standing in the community and this, in itself, gives them a degree of

access to children and vulnerable persons that they would not otherwise have. However, we have to operate within the limitations of the legislation.

As reported previously, we are working with the National Vetting Bureau on an agreed list of roles for which vetting is mandated under the legislation. It seems clear that not all roles for which we would like vetting to be carried out will be included. We are grateful to our colleagues in the National Vetting Bureau for their assistance and support and we will continue to work closely with them. We are, however, disappointed that a piece of legislation that ought to have enhanced our safeguarding has had the opposite effect, a disappointment that is shared by other organisations working with children and vulnerable adults.

It remains the policy of the Archdiocese of Dublin that those who have committed sexual offences against children or vulnerable adults are not permitted to minister in the parishes and organisations of the Diocese. Anyone who wishes to work for or on behalf of the Diocese and its parishes in a role for which vetting cannot be obtained should be asked to sign a declaration stating that they have not committed such offences. Forms will be available on [www.csps.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.csps.dublindiocese.ie).