

## **National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church issues Annual Report as new CEO takes up role.**

**12 June 2024**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (known as the National Board) has published its annual report for 2023. It covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Over this period the number of requests for safeguarding advice again increased from 282 to 306. In addition, a total of 11 safeguarding reviews were completed in the reporting period. This means that all 26 Dioceses have now had Reviews completed under the 2016 Policy. Those 26 Dioceses have also completed an annual Self-Audit, as have 50 Religious Orders/Congregations. The remaining 10 Religious Orders/Congregations who are required to conduct self-audits are in the process of completing them as we go to press. The annual self-audit process does not replace the audits carried out by the National Board but allows each Diocese or Congregation to identify any deficits or emerging issues at an early stage so they can be addressed appropriately.

This period also saw the number of allegations made against members of the Church increase by one to 252 compared to 251 the previous year. For the first time it was possible to publish figures showing that the complaints were made in 65 instances against Diocesan personnel and 187 times against members of religious congregations. The type of abuse alleged has also been included.

Because of the need to comply with data protection legislation, the information has to be anonymised. Consequently the National Board cannot be certain what level of unique complaints have been made as cross-checking is not possible.

Aidan Gordon, the newly-appointed CEO of the National Board remarked "I welcome the publication of this Annual Report as I take up my role in the National Board Office. It reflects the wide range of activities currently taking place to ensure children are safe in the Church in Ireland today as well as showing how we are responding when allegations are made. I hope to continue the good work of my predecessor across all of these areas and in line with our new Policy 'A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024' which we launched yesterday."

During 2023 the National Board concluded the revision of Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland. The new Policy has been approved by both the IEC and AMRI and came into effect from 11 June 2024.

The National Board also completed its evaluation of the Head to Heart programme. This initiative started over three years ago, with seminarians in formation in the Pontifical Irish College, Rome; St Patrick's College, Maynooth; and Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Dundalk. The programme seeks to ground child safeguarding in the theology of the Church

and to empower seminarians to address all aspects of child safeguarding in a safe space during their studies for the priesthood.

In her final Annual Report following ten years as CEO Teresa Devlin praised the work of the National Board and the work of the safeguarding teams within the church noting the progress that has been made. But she also pointed out that the damage done by abuse is ongoing.

“We cannot afford to think that we have finished our work in this area in Ireland. We clearly have more to do,” said Teresa Devlin, outgoing CEO, the National Board. “I believe that there are still gaps in our practices with complainants and their families. We must accept the need to ‘transition’ to a more compassionate response.”

**ENDS**

**For further information please contact:**

**Ger Kenny 087 2488393**