

National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, Annual Report 2021

(14/06/2022)

The National Board continued to provide support, advice and training throughout 2021 despite the ongoing pandemic. Having adjusted our work practices and redeveloped our advice and training services to operate in a socially distanced fashion during 2020, 2021 saw these changes bed in and operate more efficiently.

“As you would expect, the request for advice in 2020 rose as safeguarding teams, diocese and congregations sought to ensure safeguarding practice and standards were maintained despite the changes forced by the Covid 19 outbreak,” said Teresa Devlin, CEO, National Board. “So, in 2021 the number of requests for advice dropped back to previous levels from 392 to 258.”

The National Board received, during the period under review, April 2021 to March 2022, 178 allegations of abuse against clerics and religious. This is an increase on the previous year in which we received 134 complaints. Because of the need to comply with data protection legislation, the information has to be anonymised. Consequently we cannot be certain what level of unique complaints have been made as cross-checking is not possible.

The nature of the allegations were as follows - sexual abuse 140, physical abuse 18, boundary 8, with 12 complaints not specifying the type.

“The vast majority of complaints relate to the 1960’s 70’s and 80’s with one complaint relation to the last decade and 2 from the 2000’s,” said Devlin. “It is however important to note that allegations are still being made, and the National Board believes that every opportunity should be provided to those who have suffered abuse in the Church to come forward and receive support for the trauma they suffer.”

While 2020 saw a large increase in requests for advice request dealt with by the National Board, this pattern did not continue in 2021. However, because of the inevitable complications created by having to deliver all of our supports online as well as making progress on reviewing our (2016) standards and creating new standards for dealing with vulnerable adults, our workload did not diminish.

The end of 2021 saw the arrival of a new Chairman to the National Board Mr Justice Garrett Sheehan. He paid tribute to the outgoing chair, John Morgan, who had overseen the creation and the first decade and a half of the organisation’s existence. He described the work John Morgan had done as exemplary and stated that his contribution to safeguarding in the Church could not be overstated.

ENDS

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