



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**Review of Child Safeguarding Practice  
in the religious congregation of**

# **The Bon Secours Sisters**

**undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)**

**Date March 2015**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) was asked by the Sponsoring Bodies, namely the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union, to undertake a comprehensive review of safeguarding practice within and across all the Church authorities on the island of Ireland.

The NBSCCCI is aware that some religious congregations have ministries that involve direct contact with children while others do not. In religious congregations that have direct involvement with children, reviews of child safeguarding have been undertaken by measuring their practice compliance against all seven Church standards. Where a religious congregation no longer has, or never had ministry involving children and has not received any allegation of sexual abuse, the NBSCCCI reviews are conducted using a shorter procedure. The size, age and activity profiles of religious congregations can vary significantly and the NBSCCCI accepts that it is rational that the form of review be tailored to the profile of each Church authority, where the ministry with children is limited or non-existent. The procedure for assessment of safeguarding practice with such congregations is set out in the contents page of this report. The NBSCCCI welcomes that in order to have full openness, transparency and accountability, religious congregations that do not have ministry with children have made requests to have their safeguarding practice examined and commented upon.

The purpose of this review remains the same and it is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set down within the guidance issued by the Sponsoring Bodies in February 2009 *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and that all known allegations and concerns had been appropriately dealt with. To achieve this task, safeguarding practice in each of these Church Authorities is reviewed through an examination of policy and procedures, and through interviews with key personnel involved both within and external to the Religious Congregation.

This report contains the findings of the *Review of Child Safeguarding Practice within the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours in Ireland* undertaken by the NBSCCCI in line with the request made to it by the Sponsoring Bodies.

The findings of the review have been shared with a reference group before being submitted to Sr. Marie Ryan along with any recommendations arising from the findings. The review is not based on a review of case material as during the relevant time period there were no allegations made against members of the congregation that were within the Terms of Reference. There also were no allegations in respect of other forms of abuse within the time period, in respect of deceased and living members of the congregation. The review therefore is primarily based on policies and procedures made available plus interviews with key personnel involved in the safeguarding process within the congregation, particularly in the services run by the Congregation.

## **Introduction**

The Sisters of Bon Secours were founded in France after the French Revolution when twelve women living in Paris became aware of the great need to care for the sick and the dying. This group of women began to nurse the sick, and unlike other carers, remained in the home, day and night, demonstrating God's healing presence through compassionate care. The group chose Josephine Potel as their leader, and in January 1824 made their first profession as Sisters of Bon Secours in the Church of St. Sulpice in Paris. News of the tiny group's spirituality, and the 'good care' they offered to rich and poor, spread. Other young women joined the congregation. Following Josephine Potel's death, her successor, Angelique Geay, saw the Congregation spread through France. These spirit-filled women became known for their dedication to Christ and devotion to the sick and suffering of all classes and religions.

Ireland became the Congregation's first foreign foundation in 1861, followed in 1870 by an invitation to establish a convent in London. In 1948 they were asked to bring home nursing to the people of Scotland and also open a home for the elderly in Glasgow. In 1881 the Sisters were invited to provide nursing care in Baltimore, Maryland in the United States. The Sisters arrived in 1861 after the Famine in Ireland to care for the sick and dying in Dublin. The first Bon Secours Hospital was established in 1915 in Cork. A second hospital was established by the Sisters in Tralee in 1921 and a maternity Hospital in Cork in 1958, with other hospitals, Sanatoriums, and nursing homes in Galway, Mount Desert (Cork) and Dublin and a Mother and Baby Home in Tuam which became known as St Mary's Mother and Baby, which closed in 1961. The Sisters also established ministries caring for the sick in Belfast.

The Mother and Baby Homes which are currently under investigation by the State do not fall within the Terms of Reference of this review as there have been no allegations of sexual abuse against any Sister ministering there.

Today Bon Secours Sisters still minister through caring for the sick and dying in several locations throughout Ireland; in addition Irish Sisters minister in other parts of the world, including in Peru, Tanzania and South Africa. There remain four Bon Secours Hospitals in Ireland, located in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Tralee and one long-term care facility at Mount Desert, Cork. These facilities are mainly private and are under the governance of a Board of Directors. Each hospital has its own child safeguarding policy and procedures which is aligned to *Children First*. The hospitals are regulated either by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) or by an American regulator called Joint Commission International. The hospitals' work in relation to children does not fall within the Terms of Reference of this review; therefore neither the safeguarding policy and procedures nor the practice has been examined by NBSCCCI.

The Sisters of Bon Secours see 'healing' as a way of helping people become 'whole' physically, spiritually, psychologically, socially, materially and intellectually.

The focus of this review is to examine the current safeguarding practices of the Sisters of Bon Secours in Ireland and examine any allegation made against them, or that they have been responsible for managing.

### **1. Role Profile (past and present role with children)**

As can be noted from the Introduction, the Congregation of Bon Secours Sisters in Ireland has played a major role in health care in Ireland, both in hospital and community settings. Within this ministry they have worked as nurses, counsellors and volunteers with families and with children. In providing both pediatric and maternity care the Sisters have had regular contact with children. The reviewer has been advised that the care has always been under the presence of other adults and parents.

Currently there are Sisters who still have a role in hospital and parish ministry. There are 5 Sisters either working full or part-time in Glasnevin Hospital; 1 Sister working and 4 volunteering in Tralee in the hospital there; 6 volunteering in Mount Desert and 5 Sisters working either full or part time in Cork Hospital. 2 Sisters minister in Pastoral Care in the Galway Hospital and there are a number of Sisters who minister as Chaplains in hospitals.

One Sister is the Director of Nursing in one of the Bon Secours Hospitals; this is an administrative role and does not involve any direct contact with children.

Outside hospital work there are Sisters ministering in parishes in Lucan, Cork, Ballincollig and in Belfast in Northern Ireland.

One Sister who is a retired public health nurse provides reflexology and foot care in Offaly with adults and another provides literacy classes for adults in Cork.

There are two Sisters who are counsellors, both are accredited, one works with adults and children and one with adults.

### **2. Profile of Members:**

There are currently 112 Sisters belonging to the Congregation of Bon Secours living in Ireland. In addition there are three Sisters living and working abroad. One Sister works in Peru with the sick and while there is responsible to the Leader of Bon Secours Sisters in Peru; one Sister worked with those living with HIV and Aids in South Africa and is now working in the local community; and one Sister who lectures in a University in Tanzania.

Of the 112 who are living in Ireland 19 Sisters reside in nursing care facilities, others require care in their communities and are not active in any form of ministry. All others perform ministries as detailed above and/or in their community houses. The age range of the Sisters is 53 to 101.

### **3. Policy and Procedures Document:**

The Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours in Ireland has a very impressive child and vulnerable adult safeguarding policy and procedures document, which was signed off by the current Country Leader Sr. Marie Ryan in 2014. The policy is set within the context of the legislation and guidance both within civil society and in the Church. It refers to *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Cooperating to Safeguard Children*, as well as in the Church's *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*. All Sisters are required to commit to following the policy.

The policy begins with definitions of children and vulnerable adults (not within the remit of NBSCCCI or this review) and sets out the differing forms of abuse. It then follows the format of the NBSCCCI's seven child safeguarding standards, setting out the requirements under each standard. The procedures are clear and are easy to read. They refer to the mandatory reporting obligation to inform the civil authorities of any allegation, suspicion or concern.

There are procedures in place for preventing abuse, recruitment and safe care. The document also contains a complaints and whistle blowing procedure.

The reviewer is satisfied that the child safeguarding policy and procedures document meets the required standards, and commends the Congregation for the clarity it provides.

Sisters who work in hospitals, parishes or with other organisations, on a day to day basis are required to follow the policy and procedures of those organisations.

Sisters have received training in child safeguarding at leadership and congregational level, with NBSCCCI and with trainers registered with NBSCCCI. Further training is planned around awareness of child safeguarding, policy and procedures and role awareness.

#### **4. Structures:**

Responsibility for child safeguarding rests with the Country Team led by Sr. Marie Ryan. She is supported by a sister has been appointed as the designated liaison person, who has been appointed as the designated safeguarding liaison person in the event of any allegations emerging. Also in place are a survivor support person and a Sister to act as an advisor in the event of another Sister being accused of child abuse. Given that there have not been any allegations against any Sister; neither of these role holders has been active. All these Sisters have received training for their roles.

The country team acts as the child safeguarding committee for the Congregation in Ireland, ensuring that training, policy and procedures are all in place.

Sisters who have ministry with children in other organisations or parish ministry are vetted by those organisations for their role with children.

#### **5. Management of Allegations and liaison with the statutory authorities:**

There have not been any allegations against any member of the Bon Secours Sisters in Ireland, nor have there been any allegations against a lay member of staff or volunteer that has had to be managed by them. As a result there has been no contact between this Congregation and the civil authority agencies, An Garda Siochana or TUSLA.

Sr Marie Ryan has advised the reviewer that as part of the Congregation's support work, they offered work within the confines of a convent to a priest with a prior conviction of child sexual abuse. This arrangement has now concluded. For the duration of his work within the

convent, the priest was managed through a Safety Plan by the diocese in question and had no contact with children. NBSCCCI reviewed such cases when conducting a review of the diocese in question and was satisfied that all proper procedures had been followed.

Sr. Marie was fully informed of relevant information and put safety measures in place to ensure that there was no contact with children and therefore any risk to children was properly managed.

## **6. Conclusion:**

The Sisters of Bon Secours have played a major role in health care in Ireland. While their direct role has diminished over time, they still maintain a presence in hospitals and nursing homes and in parishes where there is regular supervised access to children. As a consequence they are required to have robust policy and procedures in place and the reviewer is satisfied that is the case.

All contact with children is supervised and Sisters have been vetted for their roles and follow the Congregation's code of behavior. There have been no allegations against any member of the Congregation, therefore there was no case management material examined during this review. For completeness the reviewer consulted with the diocese who has responsibility for the person who worked for the Sisters in one of their communities. As stated above this case was previously examined and the reviewer is satisfied that all steps have been taken both by the diocese and the Bon Secours Sisters in Ireland to manage any risk.

There is a good awareness of child safeguarding within the Country Leadership Team and the reviewer concludes that there are no concerns about the practice within the Congregation of Bon Secours in Ireland.

**Review of Child Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland**  
**Terms of Reference**  
**Small Religious Congregations**  
**(which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Notes)**

**Introduction**

In order for the NBSCCCI to be able to state that all Church Authorities on the island of Ireland have been evaluated in respect of their child safeguarding policies and practices, both historical and current, then some form of appropriate assessment has to be conducted of every one of these. It is rational however that the form of assessment is tailored to the profile of each Church Authority, and that needless expenditure of resources and unnecessary interference in the life of religious orders and communities that have no children-specific ministry would be avoided.

This review seeks to examine the current arrangements for safeguarding children across small religious congregations /orders, and missionary societies in Ireland who have limited or no direct contact with children as part of the congregation's ministry.

It would also scrutinize practice within all known cases to ensure that they have been responded to appropriately.

The review's methodology is an adaptation of the methodology developed for all dioceses and large religious congregations and missionary societies, where the ministry involves regular contact with children.

The proposed review would consider the following:-

- (a) Former role with children
- (b) Allegations of child abuse against members and how these have been responded to
- (c) Existing relationships with statutory authorities such as the HSE, Gardai in the Republic and the HSCT or PSNI in Northern Ireland.
- (d) Policies in place and being applied for safeguarding children
- (e) Roles and responsibilities and where they exist the operation of Advisory Panels, and Safeguarding Committees

The objective of the review would be to confirm if there have been any allegations and how known allegations have been responded to; in addition the review seeks to confirm what the current arrangements for safeguarding children are. In particular, emphasis will be placed on establishing how policies and practice match up to the standards set down in *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland and launched in February 2009. Priority, at all times, will be given to how policy and practice can be improved and strengthened. If policies and/or practices are identified that are concerning, inadequate, or dangerous, they will be addressed through the provision of guidance and support, and through the reporting of these situations to the appropriate statutory authorities, if this has not already happened. Similarly, those that are good examples will be highlighted with a view to them being adopted comprehensively across all parts of the



Church. All cases that relate to alleged or known offenders that are alive will be read and included in the review. In cases where the alleged or known offender is deceased, these will be sampled in an attempt to gather learning from them that will be used to inform the framing of recommendations.

### **Guidance Documents**

The review will be guided by the following:-

- (a) *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*
- (b) *Children First* Guidance in ROI; and Regional Child Protection Guidelines in Northern Ireland;
- (c) Legislation that exists in each jurisdiction which contributes to safeguarding children and young people.

The review will be undertaken by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) through their National Office and led by the Chief Executive Officer.

The review process will be overseen by a Reference Group to whom the CEO will report on a regular basis. The membership of this Reference Group has been drawn from each of the statutory child protection agencies in both jurisdictions, along with eminent individuals in the field from academia. The current Reference Group consists of: Dr Helen Buckley (TCD); Mr Paul Harrison (Tusla), and John Toner (SBNI).

It is important to confirm that the value of the review is dependent upon full and complete access to all relevant documentation and information relating to the abuse of children known to the individual Church authorities. The review will proceed on the basis that willingness exists on the part of each of the subjects of the review to provide full access to the fieldwork team, subject, where relevant, to the terms of the Data Processing Deed agreed between the Sponsoring Bodies and entered into between the parties hereto.

## **Step Guide to the Review Process**

### **Step 1.**

A letter of invitation to review is sent by the Provincial/Regional Superior or other person responsible for the congregation/ order or missionary society (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Ordinary’).

### **Step 2.**

The CEO will forward a survey to the provincial which will identify:

- Current number of members
- Past role with children
- Current role with children
- Total number of allegations received up to 2014
- Number of living members against whom there are allegations

### **Step 3.**

For any Order where there have been allegations a full review will proceed, as per step 4 - 23. For those Orders where there have been no known allegations a desk top examination of policies and procedures will take place followed by a site visit to interview all relevant personnel within the safeguarding structure. For these orders step 5 and 13-23 will apply.

### **Step 4.**

The CEO and Ordinary will confirm the dates for the fieldwork for the review, and names of the fieldwork team.

### **Step 5.**

The Church Authority will be asked to make available all of the case files and related documentation in respect of any safeguarding concerns that have been identified within the diocese. The Church Authority will make available a room with wireless internet access for the reviewers to conduct their review of files, so that any records made by the reviewers can be directly typed and stored onto a secure server which is only accessed by the reviewers. In the absence of internet access the reviewers will type their notes onto a secure encrypted USB stick for later uploading onto the secure server.

### **Step 6.**

The Church Authority will be requested to sign the revised Data Processing Deed prior to the arrival of the team.

**Step 7.**

The Church Authority will arrange a schedule of interviews with all who hold safeguarding roles within its functional area. The designated person and the Church Authority will be available to the reviewers throughout the period of fieldwork.

**Step 8.**

The fieldwork team when they arrive on site will firstly confirm that they have a suitable place to work in and that all the required documentation has been provided to them for their review. In the event that the fieldwork team forms the opinion that the Church Authority has not provided access to all such documents, the NBSCCCI shall give notice in writing to the Church Authority of the opinion of the fieldwork team and such notice shall specify the reasons for same. Thereupon, the Church Authority shall respond in detail to the notice. Each party shall use its best endeavours to resolve any differences of opinion which shall arise and, in the event that resolution is not arrived at, the parties will attempt to resolve the dispute by recourse to the services of a mediator agreed between them or nominated for the purpose at the request of any of them without prejudice to the NBSCCCI's entitlement to terminate the review. In the event that resolution has not been arrived at following mediation, either party shall be at liberty to terminate forthwith the review.

**Step 9.**

On arrival, the fieldwork team should be supplied with a single case file index that lists all the cases that have been created within the diocese. These may be divided into two groups. The first group will contain all allegations that relate to living alleged or known perpetrators. The second will contain any that are deceased.

**Step 10.**

Depending on the volume involved a decision should be made as to whether all or a random sample of the “deceased group” should be reviewed. Care should be taken to include all prominent cases in the sample.

**Step 11.**

Each case file will be reviewed by each fieldworker independently in the first instance. They will create a written summary with chronological information of the case. In certain cases a second reader may be required, this will be discussed and agreed between the fieldworkers.

**Step 12.**

Following the reading of the case and the creation of a summary, the fieldworkers will analyse and assess the actions taken in the case. They will assess compliance with agreed Church policy that was extant at that time. They will also indicate whether any current risk exists in respect of the information contained within the file and advise the church Authority of necessary safeguarding action to reduce the risk.

**Step 13.**

When all the case files have been read, the fieldwork team will then examine and review any procedures or protocols that exist within the diocese to confirm that they are in compliance with the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance* document issued by the NBSCCCI in February of 2009.

**Step 14.**

To complete the review, the fieldwork team will then seek to speak to those directly involved in the safeguarding structure in the diocese. This should include the Advisory Panel, a sample of parish safeguarding representatives, the designated person, the safeguarding committee, victim support and advisors and the Bishop/Provincial. The purpose of these interviews is to form a view of the competence and effectiveness of the safeguarding structure that exists within the Church Authority.

**Step 15.**

The fieldwork team will also seek to speak to representatives of the key statutory agencies to provide them with an opportunity to express their views on the quality of the working relationships that exist between them and the Church Authority.

**Step 16.**

A verbal feedback session on initial key findings will be given to the Church Authority.

**Step 17.**

Upon completion of the field work, the team may request to take materials – other than casework records to review off-site; this alongside all materials gathered by the reviewers, including written notes on cases and meetings, will be analysed and will form the basis of the draft assessment review report.

**Step 18.**

The draft will be forwarded to the Church Authority for factual accuracy checking.

**Step 19.**

Alongside all other reports under review, the report will be presented in draft to the Reference Group for their critique and comment. If further work is required at the direction of the Reference group the CEO will ensure this work is completed and advise the Church Authority accordingly.

**Step 20.**

The report will be legally proofed by NBSCCCI lawyer.

**Step 21.**

The report will be forwarded to the NBSCCCI for approval

**Step 22**

A final draft report will then be submitted to the Church Authority. The expectation would be that the report will be published by the Church Authority at an agreed time in the future.

**Step 23.**

All case material written, including summaries, as part of the review, which are for the reviewers use only, will be stored on a secure server.

**Guide for Reviewers**

In terms of small (female religious orders) reference should be made to the following:

1. Has the Order provided alternative care to children in an orphanage, industrial school or children's residential home, but no longer is engaged in running such services;
2. Has the order provided education to children, in both or either boarding schools and day schools, but no longer does so ;
3. Has the order provided medical and/or nursing services to children, but no longer does so;

4. Has the order provided any other services to children, in community services centres, youth clubs etc., and no longer does so;
5. Does the order currently provide any sort of service to children and families that brings them into regular contact with children;
6. Has the order never provided any service to children (e.g. contemplative orders).

In relation to category 1 above;

1. The reviewers will establish whether any service they provided is included in the list of children's residential services produced by the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB);
2. If this is the case, reference should be made to this.
3. If complaints have been referred to the Redress Board or Ryan Commission, this review cannot access these records and that will be stated in the report.
4. If the order has received complaints which have not been processed through Redress or Ryan these cases will be thoroughly examined as detailed above.

### **Review of Policy and Procedures**

1. It is recognised that not all Orders will have any ministry with children and therefore their policies and procedures should reflect the work that they do with children.
2. If the Order only works through other organisations, example in Diocesan work or in schools, they are required to follow the policies of those organisations.
3. If there are gaps in the policy document an assessment should be made as to whether the ministry engaged in requires full compliance with all criteria attached to the seven standards
4. Where it is clear that the criteria do not apply a reference should be made at the beginning of the review report that the Order's ministry is not directly with children and therefore adherence to particular criteria do not apply.
5. If the Order is a contemplative Order, there is no expectation that they will have detailed policies and procedures, but reference should be made to their ministry and that they have no contact with children.
6. In all cases, contact will be made with the civil authorities to identify if they have any child safeguarding concerns in relation to the order.